

---

---

# First to the Party: The Group Origins of the Partisan Transformation on Civil Rights, 1940–1960

**Christopher A. Baylor**, *College of the Holy Cross*

*One of the most momentous shifts in twentieth-century party politics was the Democratic Party's embrace of civil rights. Recent scholarship finds that this realignment began as early as the 1940s and traces it to pressure groups, especially organized labor. But such scholarship does not explain why labor, which was traditionally hostile to African Americans, began to work with them. Nor does it ascribe agency to the efforts of African American pressure groups. Focusing on the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), this article attempts to fill these gaps in the literature. It explains why civil rights and labor leaders reassessed their traditional animosities and began to work as allies in the Democratic Party. It further shows how pressure from the new black-blue alliance forced the national Democratic Party to stop straddling civil rights issues and to become instead the vehicle for promoting civil rights. NAACP and CIO leaders consciously sought to remake the Democratic Party by marginalizing conservative Southerners, and eventually succeeded.*

The partisan transformation on civil rights is arguably the most important twentieth-century case in American politics in which parties changed positions on an entire dimension of political conflict. At the turn of the twentieth century, the Democratic Party was widely viewed as the party that had initiated secession, obstructed Reconstruction, and institutionalized Jim Crow. As late as the 1930s, there were few signs that the party would represent the interests of African Americans. Though sponsoring the New Deal, which was popular among black voters, few Democratic leaders wanted a colorblind distribution of its benefits. Some in the party supported civil rights legislation, but Franklin Roosevelt was famously reticent on this subject, and the party's entrenched southern wing was adamantly opposed. All in all, the Democratic Party was little more promising as an ally to African Americans than was the party of Lincoln, which had not prioritized civil rights in decades. Yet, in the 1960s, Democratic Party leaders passed several landmark civil rights laws while Republicans

became the party of states' rights. The civil rights transformation arguably presaged the future partisan division on cultural issues as well. How and when did the parties change?

Not long ago, leading scholarship held that that the fundamental change occurred in the 1960s. In particular, Carmines and Stimson argue that Republicans and Democrats resembled each other on civil rights until 1964, when Democratic Party elites led their party's evolution on civil rights.<sup>1</sup> Recent scholarship has challenged this account and argues that realignment took place in the 1940s. Among the revisionists, Farhang and Katznelson contend that southern Democrats began to ally with Republicans in the 1940s to limit the power of labor unions and the new political regime they were creating.<sup>2</sup> Chen, Mickey, and Van Houweling also find that California Republicans were more likely to oppose Fair Employment Practice Commissions (FEPCs) in the same decade, and Chen finds similar patterns in other states.<sup>3</sup> Feinstein and Schickler suggest that the

I would like to thank two anonymous reviewers for extensive and thoughtful feedback, which was much more detailed than the norm for journal submissions. John Zaller and Scott James also provided insightful responses to several drafts of this paper. I thank Eric Schickler for substantial comments on an early version. My colleagues at Wellesley College, including Tom Burke, Nadya Hajj, Hahrie Han, Bill Joseph, Marion Just, Joel Krieger, Paul MacDonald, and Lena Zuckerwise, made helpful suggestions on a practice talk based on this paper. Finally, Ayobami Lanijonu's insights on the NAACP and Kira Newman's suggestions on grammar and clarity are gratefully acknowledged.

1. Edward Carmines and James Stimson, *Issue Evolution: Race and the Transformation of American Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989).

2. Sean Farhang and Ira Katznelson, "The Southern Imposition: Congress and Labor in the New Deal and Fair Deal," *Studies in American Political Development* 19 (2005).

3. Anthony S. Chen, Robert W. Mickey, and Robert P. Van Houweling, "Explaining the Contemporary Alignment of Race and Party: Evidence from California's 1946 Ballot Initiative on Fair Employment," *Studies in American Political Development* 22 (2008): 204–28; Anthony Chen, *The Fifth Freedom: Jobs, Politics, and Civil*

Democratic Party coalition partners led state Democratic parties to adopt more racially liberal platforms than Republicans did.<sup>4</sup> Schickler, Pearson, and Feinstein provide evidence that “meso-level” party activists influenced the national party through Congress, where northern Democrats were more likely to support discharge petitions in favor of civil rights.<sup>5</sup>

I concur with the revisionists in tracing the partisan transformation on civil rights to the 1940s. In the research presented below, I delve more deeply into the interest group origins of the civil rights movement. The Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), groups that were not initially friendly toward one another, forged a new alliance that aimed, as a matter of conscious strategy, to remake the Democratic Party as the vehicle of their policy interests. While the NAACP was one among many civil rights groups, it was the principal civil rights group working with the CIO in its effort to bring African Americans into the Democratic Party and drive out the agents of southern segregation. This paper examines both the cause of the alliance—changing organizational needs and goals—and the transformative effect of this alliance on the Democratic Party. The motives behind the alliance included both groups’ policy agendas as well as the need to sustain themselves as organizations. The groups worked to finesse their differences in the interest of an effective political alliance.

Before the McGovern-Fraser reforms, national party conventions were the locus of national power within the parties. At party conventions of the 1940s and 1950s, the CIO sought to realign the party by gaining delegate support for nominees and platforms satisfactory to liberals and civil rights activists. Platforms and nominations do not, of course, bind the “party-in-government” to do anything whatsoever. But activists nonetheless viewed their convention struggles as meaningful, and correctly so. Extensive behind-the-scenes maneuvers at the 1944 convention led to the vice-presidential nomination of the racially moderate Harry S. Truman, rather than the South Carolina segregationist James Byrnes, as the back-up to the visibly moribund Franklin Roosevelt. Adoption of a racially liberal platform at the 1948 convention signaled a strengthening commitment to civil rights, which led directly to a walkout by many southern

delegates.<sup>6</sup> Georgia Senator Richard Russell’s failure to get his presidential nomination off the ground at the 1952 convention was another meaningful signal of the party’s direction.

From the vantage point of the 1930s, the alliance between the NAACP and CIO that helped bring about these outcomes was anything but a forgone conclusion. Labor had a record of hostility to blacks. But the alliance overcame this history and forced the national Democratic Party to meet a minimum threshold of support for civil rights. This threshold was unacceptable to many Southerners, some of whom never supported national Democratic candidates after bolting the 1948 convention. Without strategic pressure from external groups, it is likely that African Americans would have spent more time without a party, and it is possible that the Democratic Party would have maintained the same balance between northern and southern interests as it had in the 1930s. Many northern Democratic leaders had shown themselves quite willing to continue cooperating with southern segregationists even after it was clear that the demographic base of the party was changing.

To use Barry Goldwater’s metaphor of “hunting where the ducks are,” the alliance of the CIO and NAACP did not simply attract politicians to new hunting grounds. It created a hospitable ecosystem for ducks that changed the hunters’ behavior. It was an environment in which labor and civil rights travelled together, so that disturbing one was likely to disturb the other. This new environment offered nourishment—door knockers, prestige endorsements, registration of friendly voters—to rising politicians who would commit to the cause.

Part of the reason that political scientists have overlooked the role of the CIO and the NAACP in changing the Democratic Party is that they have only recently focused on the role of groups, rather than national politicians, in defining parties. Political scientist E. E. Schattschneider asserted that pressure groups are “rarely organized to deliver votes” or “conduct an active campaign in the electorate.”<sup>7</sup> But he overlooked the possibility that groups could remake nominating coalitions. And he overlooked as well the active efforts of unions and civil rights leaders to mobilize their followers, some of whom were otherwise inattentive to politics, for this purpose. A political science and social movement

*Rights in the United States, 1941–1972* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

4. Brian Feinstein and Eric Schickler, “Platforms and Partners: The Civil Rights Realignment Reconsidered,” *Studies in American Political Development* 22 (2008): 226.

5. Eric Schickler, Kathryn Pearson, and Brian Feinstein, “Congressional Parties and Civil Rights Politics from 1933 to 1972,” *Journal of Politics* 72 (2010).

6. One political scientist writes that platforms act “as a window through which to view factional fights and a means to assess their relative strength.” Jo Freeman, “Feminism vs. Family Values: Women at the 1992 Democratic and Republican Conventions,” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 26 (March 1993), 26.

7. In one of his later works, Schattschneider estimated that the AFL-CIO affected only 20 percent of their members’ views, because many members abstained from voting and others would have voted Democratic even without AFL-CIO influence. E. E. Schattschneider, *Party Government* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977), 201.

literature, developed since Schattschneider wrote, has documented the influence of interest groups in intra-party conflict. McAdam argues that “embedded insiders” follow the cues of their group as they “are threatened with the loss of meaning and membership for failure to adopt the new ideational and behavioral requirements of the collective.”<sup>8</sup> Carsey, Layman, et al. show that interest groups can extend conflict to new domains by entering party primaries, nominating candidates committed to their policies, and thereby building leverage within the party. I concur with these insights, but go a step further: groups can change parties by working *with each other* to alter the incentives of ambitious politicians.

Feinstein and Schickler and Schickler, Pearson, and Feinstein also credit party change to a network of liberal interest groups, but do not specify nominating contests as the mechanism for change.<sup>9</sup>

8. Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930–1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Geoffrey C. Layman, Thomas M. Carsey, John Green, Richard Herrera, and Rosalyn Cooperman, “Activists and Conflict Extension in American Party Politics,” *American Political Science Review* 104 (2010); Brian Mayer, *Blue-green Coalitions: Fighting for Safe Workplaces and Healthy Communities* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009). Also see Duane Oldfield, *The Right and the Righteous: The Christian Right Confronts the Republican Party* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996); Marty Cohen, David Karol, Hans Noel, and John Zaller, *The Party Decides: Presidential Nominations Before and After Reform* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); and Daniel K. Williams, *God’s Own Party* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

9. My account’s emphasis on the national ambitions of each group differs with many recent accounts of civil rights groups, which stress the realignment of state parties (Feinstein and Schickler 2008; Chen 2009) and local groups (Sugrue 2003) to implement civil rights. Both unions and civil rights activists fought at multiple levels of government, and local governments and institutions translated national policies to suit their interests. Still, the civil rights–labor alliance was forged largely to pursue federal policy changes. The most important of the groups involved in civil rights reform, the CIO, prioritized national politics because of issues that could only be resolved at the national level. In the CIO’s view, the living standards of all workers in America affected their own workers in an interdependent economy. They sought a package of economic measures designed to promote a full employment economy, but had little chance of passing meaningful reforms through southern legislatures, or displacing powerful southern chairmen in Congress, without a national political strategy. At the local level, CIO leaders found that workplace integration was often a liability, and their incentives were more muddled than national political considerations in favor of civil rights. The CIO’s success as a union depended on maintaining the Wagner Act and the liberal jurisprudence of the New Deal regime, and only the federal government could adopt countercyclical policies capable of avoiding another depression. Additionally, as long as the South remained a bastion of low wages and union restrictions, the CIO program was in jeopardy. Federal economic regulations, such as the minimum wage, were the remedy. The NAACP, likewise, needed a national strategy to bring about civil rights in the South, where most blacks were disenfranchised and state legislatures stood firmly against them. The NAACP was able to fight poll taxes at the state level with some success in the 1940s, but they normally enjoyed little success in southern state politics. National laws, court appointments, and congressional protocol could not be changed without a coordinated national strategy. Local results depended on national changes.

Similarly, Bawn et al.<sup>10</sup> espouse an innovative theory that parties are coalitions of “policy demanders” working for mutual advantage, rather than coalitions of politicians working together to win elections. Yet they do not draw out the mixture of interests that impelled unions to transform the Democratic Party on race, and offer few details on the mechanism of change. Nor do they flesh out the distinction between grassroots activists and interest-group leaders. Our evidence shows that group leaders mobilized followers politically at a grassroots level, and their members often followed the group’s lead in spite of disagreements on issues such as labor unions and civil rights.<sup>11</sup>

In summary, the research presented below shows that the Democratic Party did not become the party of civil rights by following the lead of ambitious politicians or responding to the inducements of individual interest groups. Nor were demographic changes sufficient to cause party leaders to change on their own. Two interest groups, leading rather than following their memberships, tacitly formed a pact and successfully pursued a joint strategy of party cooptation.

The next three sections will document the NAACP and CIO’s strategic decisions on labor issues, civil rights issues, and political parties. Because the alliance of the two organizations was far from a foregone conclusion, the factors leading to the alliance were as responsible for the Democratic Party’s transformation as the pressure the allies applied to the Democratic Party. After I establish the cause of the alliance, I examine the alliance’s interactions with political parties in the 1940s, and its role in the pivotal 1948 Democratic National Convention. The subsequent section shows that civil rights supporters sustained their important place in the party from 1952 through 1960. Finally, alternate explanations are considered in light of the evidence presented.

## THE BLEAK POLITICAL ARENA FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS

Before the transformative decade of the 1940s, African Americans confronted a barren political landscape. Politicians of both parties appealed to African American voters, but these efforts were generally half-hearted and ineffective. Politicians often appealed simultaneously to states’ rights proponents in the South. African Americans learned to expect neglect and unfulfilled platform promises from their nominal Republican allies in the early twentieth century. Since they were a small voting bloc in the

10. Kathleen Bawn, Martin Cohen, David Karol, Seth Masket, Hans Noel, and John Zaller, “A Theory of Political Parties: Groups, Policy Demands and Nominations in American Politics,” *Perspectives on Politics* 10 (2012): 571–97.

11. Chen’s (2009) focus on the role of ordinary voters also contrasts with my findings.



North and disenfranchised in the South, they had little to offer from an electoral standpoint.<sup>12</sup>

The Democratic Party institutionalized Jim Crow and filibustered Republican attempts to protect basic civil rights. Many blacks defected to the Democratic Party in the midst of the New Deal in 1936 (see Figure 1).<sup>13</sup> Despite their support, Roosevelt refused to address lynching and government discrimination, even when Congress brought them up. He explained to civil rights activists that southern members of Congress, whose support was essential for New Deal legislation, prevented him from playing an active role in civil rights.<sup>14</sup> The pursuit of civil rights could turn southern Democrats, who had accepted parts of the New Deal, against it.<sup>15</sup> Other national Democratic Party leaders, including party chairmen, paid little attention to blacks before World War II.<sup>16</sup> New York Senator Robert F. Wagner consistently supported civil rights, but did not

12. James Weldon Johnson, "Report of the Field Secretary on Interview with Senator Warren G. Harding," August 9, 1920, Mf C 63-65, NAACP Collection (Washington, DC: Library of Congress), hereafter NAACP; Moorfield Storey to James Weldon Johnson, July 18, 1922, NAACP C75-77; L. K. Williams to John Hamilton, undated, NAACP II-A-226; Roy Wilkins to John Hamilton, March 15, 1938, NAACP II-L-27; John Hamilton to Roy Wilkins, March 14, 1938, NAACP II-L-27; and Roy Wilkins to John Hamilton, March 15, 1938, NAACP II-L-27.

13. See also David Karol, *Party Position Change in American Politics* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Ralph Bunche, *The Political Status of the Negro in the Age of FDR* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973); Nancy Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983); and Roy Fauntroy, *Republicans and the Black Vote* (Boulder, CO: Lynn Rienner Publications, 2007), 47. The NAACP argued at the time that the defection was not a response to New Deal benefits, but a repudiation of the hypocrisy and unfulfilled promises of recent Republican leaders (Walter White to Henry Patterson, October 1 1938, NAACP II-L-27).

14. David Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2000), 329.

15. Kari Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt and the End of the Solid South, 1932-1968* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 18, 26, 144. South Carolina Senator James Byrnes said during the 1938 antilynching battle that the white people in the South "had never voted for a Republican candidate," but only "due to the belief that when problems affecting the Negro and the very soul of the South arose, they could depend upon the Democrats of the North to rally to their support." Byrnes, who would become an important adviser to Roosevelt during his third term, had traditionally been a conciliatory figure, not a race baiter. He had never been prompted to issue such warnings during the Roosevelt administration until a majority of northern Democrats voted for an antilynching bill. George E. Mowry, *Another Look at the Twentieth-Century South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press 1973), 70.

16. James Farley, the Democratic Party Chairman from 1933-1940, almost never discussed African Americans or the potential of their vote in his copious, almost daily notes. James Farley Memorandum to Self, March 16, 1937 and November 4, 1937, Box 40-42, Reel 3, James Farley Papers (Washington, DC: Library of Congress); James Farley Memorandum to Self, November 4, 1937, 40-42, Reel 3.

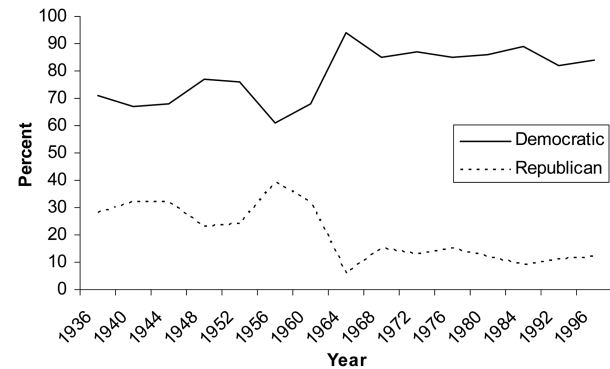


Fig. 1. African American Presidential Vote.

Source: David A. Bositis, "Blacks and the 2004 Democratic National Convention," Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, Table 1, Presidential Vote and Party Identification of Black Americans, 1936-2000, 9. Bositis obtained data from early years from Everett Ladd, Jr. and Charles D. Hadley, *Transformations of the American Party System: Political Coalitions from the New Deal to the 1970s* (New York: Norton, 1975), 60. Ladd and Hadley used surveys from the American Institute of Public Opinion.

attempt to transform the party.<sup>17</sup> In 1941, civil rights groups forced President Roosevelt to issue Executive Order 8802, which banned discrimination in defense industries, only by threatening a March on Washington.<sup>18</sup>

The most prestigious civil rights organization at the time, the NAACP, attempted to avoid overt partisanship<sup>19</sup> and play both parties against each other. To the extent that parties represented the governed, the NAACP's only hope for representation was party realignment. Executive Secretary Walter White expressed his desire for "a new alignment with liberalism on one side and reaction on the other, and then

17. The same holds true for his aide, Leon Keyserling, who became active in efforts to liberalize the party in the late 1940s. See the Robert F. Wagner Papers and Leon Keyserling Papers (Washington, DC: Georgetown University). In the hearings for Supreme Court nominee John Parker, Senator Wagner alone had argued that Parker's opposition to labor rights and civil rights were part of a "single trait of character," a point made to him by black union leader A. Philip Randolph. Paul Moreno, *Black Americans and Organized Labor: A New History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 2007), 160.

18. Kenneth Janken, *White: The Biography of Walter White, Mr. NAACP* (New York: New Press, 2009).

19. When President Arthur Spingarn openly supported Roosevelt in 1936, qualifying that he was not speaking for the organization, Executive Secretary Walter White stated that Spingarn was a "volunteer" who did not represent the organization, and pointed out that some board members supported Republican challenger Alf Landon. In the election of 1940, White declined invitations to join organized groups for Roosevelt, and another NAACP official was rebuked for openly supporting the Republican candidate, Wendell Willkie. Simon Topping, "Supporting our Friends and Defeating Our Enemies: Militancy and Nonpartisanship in the NAACP, 1936-1948," *Journal of African American History* 89 (Winter, 2004): 20-22.

minority groups like the Negro will very largely benefit in this new alignment of forces.”<sup>20</sup> Another member of the NAACP wrote that if Republicans consolidated conservative Southerners into their party, they would create a two-party system in the South in which black voters held “the balance of power.”<sup>21</sup> Such a system was the only way to depose entrenched Democratic incumbents.

The NAACP was not the only important civil rights organization. But several pieces of evidence indicate that it enjoyed broader support among African Americans than any other civil rights group. Politicians and opinion pollsters alike conceded its political clout after World War II, and it is the only African American civil rights organization that is mentioned with any frequency in our research on the national Democratic Party struggles that remade the party’s position on civil rights. In 1952 pollster Elmo Roper said the NAACP’s position was “held in respect by at least 45 percent of Negroes,” and argued it were capable of swaying the election. The NAACP was “far and away the most frequently mentioned organization” that held weight with African Americans.<sup>22</sup> Decades earlier, it had not only helped to defeat President Hoover’s nomination of a segregationist to the Supreme Court in 1930, but helped defeat members of Congress who had supported the appointment. Segregationist Senator James Byrnes privately admitted that he funded a committee to investigate defense-industry discrimination to ward off an NAACP fight against his anticipated Supreme Court nomination.<sup>23</sup>

To be sure, other African American groups fought vigorously for civil rights, but most of the politically active groups worked in close cooperation with the NAACP. The National Committee to Abolish the Poll Tax, for example, received significant assistance from both the NAACP and the CIO. The National Urban League, formed one year after the NAACP, specialized in employment, not politics. The Congress of Racial Equality, founded in 1942, focused on direct action and civil disobedience rather than elections and nominations. In 1957, black churches formed the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) as a political arm. It, too, emphasized direct action over legislation and litigation;

furthermore, other groups had laid the groundwork for a racially liberal Democratic Party by the time it was formed.<sup>24</sup> A. Philip Randolph’s March on Washington Movement (MOWM) successfully pressured Presidents Roosevelt and Truman into signing executive orders in favor of civil rights. While these orders were pivotal events for party transformation, Randolph needed the help of the NAACP with President Roosevelt and the CIO-NAACP alliance with Truman. The radical National Negro Congress gained some traction with the CIO’s help in the Great Depression, but the CIO worked to marginalize its influence after World War II. By that time, the CIO decided to work exclusively with the NAACP among civil rights organizations.<sup>25</sup> No other civil rights group had such a privileged arrangement with one of the Democratic Party’s core coalition partners in the formative years of the 1940s and 1950s. When CIO and Democratic Party records mention civil rights during these transformative decades, the NAACP is the most frequently cited organization.

### Considering a Labor Alliance

With both parties largely closed to African Americans, and neither party willing to take a stand against southern racial conservatives, the NAACP looked to powerful interest groups to gain access to the political arena. The strategy that ultimately provided access was set in motion in 1940, when the NAACP began working with the CIO, a core group of the Democratic Party. In the past, it focused mainly on civil rights issues, not labor or economic issues.<sup>26</sup> Blacks, who had scarcely any representation in the Democratic Party before this time, could never have achieved their national political goals without the help of the CIO. The CIO-NAACP alliance brought the NAACP more firmly into the camp of New Deal Democrats and provided the NAACP with additional political and financial clout.

The alliance forged between the NAACP and the CIO required an arduous effort to convince black workers to set aside their troubled history. The rank and file of both organizations followed their leaders reluctantly. Many black workers, churches, and newspapers distrusted most labor unions due to a record

20. Address delivered by Walter White before the 28<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the NAACP, Detroit, Michigan, July 4, 1937 (NAACP mf 1 r 9).

21. “Present Status of Anti-Lynching Legislation” (no author listed), January 25, 1938, NAACP II L27. Congressional votes in the 1970s and 1980s bear out the NAACP’s prediction, as southern Democrats facing Republican challengers became increasingly liberal on civil rights (Karol, *Party Position Change in American Politics*, 122).

22. “Roper Reports on Importance of Negro Vote, NAACP Stand,” June 22, 1952, NAACP II-A-452.

23. Walter White to Lester Granger, March 21, 1941, NAACP Mf Part 13 A, Reel 24.

24. Steven Lawson, *Running for Freedom: Civil Rights and Black Politics in America Since 1941* (New York: McGraw-Hill), 9, 15, 63–64.

25. John Brophy to Philip Connelly, November 26, 1946, mf 26, in Katherine Martin, ed., *Operation Dixie: The CIO Organizing Committee Papers, 1946–1953* (Sanford, North Carolina: Microfilming Corporation of America), hereafter *Operation Dixie*.

26. The alliance conformed to Zald and Ash’s definition of a coalition, in which two groups coordinate on political strategy and at least one of the groups adopts “new organizational identities, changes in the membership base, and changes in goals.” Mayer N. Zald and Roberta Ash, “Social Movement Organizations: Growth, Decay and Change,” *Social Forces* 44 (1966): 335.

of exclusion that continued past the New Deal.<sup>27</sup> Editorials in the largest black newspapers, the *Pittsburgh Courier* and the *Chicago Defender*, were divided on unions in the 1930s.<sup>28</sup> Even the racially liberal CIO had difficulty making inroads among northern black workers.<sup>29</sup> Many CIO affiliates

27. Conflicts and cooperation between labor and African Americans, both during this time period and in subsequent decades, have been explored in detail by labor historians. Among some of the important sources of information for this study were Alan Draper, *Conflict of Interests: Organized Labor and the Civil Rights Movement in the South, 1954–1968* (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 1994); Michael Goldfield, *The Color of Politics: Race and the Mainsprings of American Politics* (New York: New Press, 1997); Michael K. Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights: Organizing Memphis Workers* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Robert Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Robert Korstad and Nelson Lichtenstein, “Opportunities Found and Lost: Labor, Radicals and the Early Civil Rights Movement,” *Journal of American History* 75 (1988); David Lewis-Coleman, *Race against Liberalism: Black Workers and the UAW in Detroit* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008); Nelson Lichtenstein, *Walter Reuther: The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Nancy MacLean, “Achieving the Problem of the Civil Rights Act: Herbert Hill and the NAACP’s Fight for Jobs and Justice,” *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* (Summer 2006); Robert J. Norrell, “Caste in Steel: Jim Crow Careers in Birmingham, Alabama,” *Journal of American History* 73 (December 1986); Moreno, *Black Americans and Organized Labor*, 154; August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 16; David Bernstein, *Only One Place of Redress* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 92. Bernstein mentions a conference of black newspapers that condemned unionism in 1914. He mistakenly dates the conference year as 1924.

28. I sampled black newspapers using a ProQuest search. They tended to be unequivocally supportive by the 1940s, by which time civil rights organizations were also more supportive. The terms entered into a ProQuest search engine were union, labor, AFL, CIO, William Green, strike, Wagner Act, capital, capitalism, socialism, and communism. The years were different for different publications based on availability. Generally, I chose 1922 and 1937 because antilynching laws were proposed in those two years, and I plan to compare black newspapers to other newspapers in the future. The *Pittsburgh Courier* remained a staunchly Republican newspaper until the Great Depression. Although one editorial supported unions in 1911, only two of four editorials concerning unions in 1924 were pro-union. In the 1930s, editorials continued to condemn discriminatory unions, but praised New Deal laws granting protection to unions, and admonished blacks not to blame unions for not remedying discrimination overnight. In 1937, 81 percent of fifteen *Pittsburgh Courier* editorials were pro-union, satisfied with the record of the CIO and hopeful about its future. The *Chicago Defender*, which had urged blacks to consider voting Democratic in the 1920s, became supportive of unions after World War II. Only three of the twelve editorials concerning unions in 1922 were favorable. While supporting the right to unionize and encouraging blacks to join nondiscriminatory unions, the *Defender* also favored the right of a worker to not join a workplace union and to serve as a replacement worker. In 1937, 54 percent of twenty-two editorials were pro-union. Some editorials argued that unions forced blacks to be “scabs,” but the *Defender* showed itself to be hopeful about the CIO and its prospects for race relations. In 1947, 90 percent of the *Defender*’s thirty-seven editorials about unions were positive.

29. Philip S. Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker, 1619–1973* (New York: International Publishers, 1976), 215–37. The CIO

continued to practice discrimination and, wary of past discrimination, black leaders and workers waited before endorsing the new rival of the morally obtuse American Federation of Labor (AFL).<sup>30</sup> New Deal labor laws had the potential to exacerbate tensions between unions and black workers by legally empowering discriminatory unions.<sup>31</sup>

Organizational interests at first drove the NAACP away from organized labor, but later brought them together. At the NAACP’s 1933 Amenia Conference, W.E.B. Du Bois, the editor of the NAACP’s publication, *The Crisis*, recruited young intellectuals dubbed the “Young Turks” who wanted to shift the focus from race to class. Most were sympathetic to labor unions and wanted the NAACP to encourage mass political action among the black working class. During the 1930s, Executive Secretary Walter White prevented Du Bois and the Young Turks from implementing their progressive, pro-union economic agenda. White specialized in legal action to bring about integration, and the Young Turks’ strategy would shift responsibility away from him. Realizing that he would not be the right person to mobilize workers, and determined to maintain his central role in the association, White steered the organization in a different direction.<sup>32</sup> He managed to keep the NAACP’s focus on legal reform by portraying a workers’ program as impractical and removing

---

signaled its support for civil rights at its inception, barring discrimination in its constitution and unanimously endorsing antilynching laws at national gatherings.

30. Schickler and Caughey’s analysis of early survey data concludes that northern blacks were more liberal than northern Democrats generally on labor issues (Eric Schickler and Devin Caughey, “Public Opinion, Organized Labor, and the Limits of New Deal Liberalism, 1936–1945,” *Studies in American Political Development* 25 [2011]). This sympathy is not apparent in historical accounts of black laborers in the 1930s (Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker*, 216; Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW*, 26; and Janken, *White*, 244, 251). Even those less sensitive to the historic realities of labor unions had no idea if unions would succeed or control future hiring, in which case, currying favor with management was less risky. Some worried that blacks would be unable to obtain jobs in unionized workplaces dominated by white workers, while others worried that plantwide union seniority rules would weaken the seniority of black workers in traditionally African American departments (Risa Goluboff, *The Lost Promise of Civil Rights* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 174–82; Lucy Mason to W.W. Ball, May 27, 1940, *Operation Dixie* 62; John L. Lewis to W.W. Ball, June 10, 1940, *Operation Dixie* mf 62). Even if the national NAACP had been more open to the CIO in the 1930s, it would have encountered significant resistance from some of its chapters (See Roy Wilkins to A.C. MacNeal, April 13, 1936, NAACP I-G-53.)

31. “Panel Discussion: Economic Opportunity and Employment” before the Thirtieth Annual Conference of the NAACP in Richmond, Virginia, June 28, 1939, NAACP Mf Part 1 r10; Walter White to Senator James Couzens; April 11, 1934, NAACP I-C-257; Walter White to Harry Hopkins, April 26, 1934, NAACP I-C-257; and Bernstein, *Only One Place of Redress*, 47–48.

32. Janken, *White*, 182–84.



opposition within the organization.<sup>33</sup> Mary White Ovington, a socialist who had helped found the organization, called the Young Turks' strategy report a "revolutionary doctrine to which I for one of the Board subscribe, but those who want to bring it to the Negro will do best to bring it through the socialist or communistic organizations." She asserted that if they used the NAACP for these goals, it would alienate middle-class supporters and the organization would "run ahead and then back water when dissension came." She added that very few blacks supported socialism and the NAACP should put forward a program endorsed by most blacks.<sup>34</sup> Black workers and white union members had a common class, but the forthcoming nationwide alliance was the result of organizational strategy rather than a historical inevitability.

### The CIO-NAACP Alliance

Civil rights groups and unions had rivalries with other like-minded groups and with each other that may have precluded the CIO from effecting changes in the Democratic Party until the 1940s. An alliance between labor unions and civil rights groups required considerable tact and strategy. Leaders in each organization had to shepherd their organizations toward issue positions that were consonant with those of the other organization.

The NAACP began vigorously supporting the cause of labor by 1940, reflecting its organizational interests. As the new decade approached, the NAACP held discussions about maintaining member interest and meeting mounting financial challenges. The organization was worried about competition from more radical groups such as the National Negro Congress and the MOWM.<sup>35</sup> At that time, and later, the NAACP refused to relinquish its dominant position over other civil rights groups.<sup>36</sup> In the first half of the 1930s, NAACP annual revenue was half of what it had been in the 1920s, and one study showed that declining middle-class contributions accounted for

much of the loss. In 1939, the IRS disallowed tax deductions for donations to the NAACP because of its political "propagandizing," forcing the NAACP to rely less on donations from large donors.<sup>37</sup> In contrast to the national organization, the Chicago, Detroit, and Baltimore NAACP branches greatly flourished by recruiting black laborers.<sup>38</sup> By 1940, the organization saw new advantages in becoming a mass organization, shifting from its reliance on middle-class whites and black professionals.<sup>39</sup>

Working with unions would not only help the NAACP to recruit working-class blacks: the CIO had the ability to provide considerable "political muscle," in Charles Houston's words. The CIO could distribute political literature, solicit donations, and recruit canvassers from a captive audience in a given workplace. Long before politicians used direct mailing, the CIO Political Action Committee (PAC) knew workers' home addresses and could target workers in pivotal precincts to volunteer for candidates and register to vote.<sup>40</sup>

A turning point in the NAACP's behavior toward labor occurred in 1940. The NAACP's written records do not directly announce a decision to ally with labor, but they reveal a pattern of support that contrasts with the organization's earlier behavior. The NAACP considered proposing an antidiscrimination amendment to the Wagner Act, but worried that doing so would alienate labor and set a dangerous precedent for federal harassment of unions.<sup>41</sup> When Representative Howard Smith attempted to make changes to the Wagner Act, the NAACP dubiously claimed it had always supported the closed-shop union. It declared that the changes were intended to "emasculate" the Wagner Act rather than resolve disputes more fairly.<sup>42</sup> After a meeting

37. Walter White to Arthur Spingarn, October 5, 1939; White to William Rosenwald, October 10, 1939; White to Rosenwald, October 10, 1939; White to Rosenwald, November 22, 1939; all in NAACP I-80.

38. Beth Tompkins Bates, *Pullman Porters and the Rise of Protest Politics in Black America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

39. Also see Memorandum from Roy Wilkins to Walter White, March 24, 1939, NAACP mf I-80.

40. Steven Fraser, *Labor Will Rule: Sidney Hillman and the Rise of American Labor* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1991), 512.

41. William H. Hastie, Memorandum to the Committee to Study Discrimination in Labor Unions, February 19, 1940, NAACP II-A-128; Handwritten minutes, Committee to Study Discrimination in Labor Unions, June 9, 1940, NAACP II-A-128; Memorandum to Mr. Marshall from Mr. White, March 11, 1940; NAACP Mf Part 13b r23.

42. The NAACP claimed in 1940 that it had always supported collective bargaining, the closed-shop union, and the original Wagner Act (Walter White to Matthew Dunn, May 14 1940, NAACP 11-A-443). All of the NAACP documents I found concerning the Wagner Act of 1935, including indices to the collections, are limited to support for an antidiscrimination amendment to it; the earliest written support for nondiscriminatory closed-shop unions was 1940 (Walter White to Alfred Baker Lewis, April 12, 1940, NAACP II-A-128). There were numerous statements in favor of

33. Beth Tompkins Bates, "A New Crowd Challenges the Agenda of the Old Guard."

34. Ross, J.E. *Spingarn and the Rise of the NAACP, 1911–1939*, 230. Abram Harris, a radical economist who later chaired the economics department at Howard University, was the author of the 1935 report.

35. Memorandum from Roy Wilkins to Walter White, March 24, 1939, NAACP mf I-80. See also Janken, *White*, 259.

36. When President Truman created the President's Committee on Civil Rights, White tried to dominate the proceedings by providing NAACP information to its members. He wrote to Thurgood Marshall that "We must move fast . . . we must not let anybody else steal the show from us" (Gary A. Donaldson, *Truman Defeats Dewey* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 107). The NAACP also tried to marginalize A. Philip Randolph's role in the National Council for a Permanent Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) (Denton Watson, *Lion in the Lobby: Clarence Mitchell, Jr.'s Struggle for the Passage of Civil Rights Law* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1990), 166.

with CIO President John L. Lewis and several other labor leaders, the NAACP suggested its own amendment to prevent Smith from using civil rights to discredit unions.<sup>43</sup> White wrote with hope that “I think such a step might conceivably strengthen our position with labor.”<sup>44</sup> The NAACP amendment was even revised for labor’s benefit at the risk of making it more difficult to prove discrimination. The first draft denied legal benefits to unions that discriminated, but the later draft changed the phrasing to deny benefits to unions that “customarily” or “usually” discriminated. An NAACP memo read:

These changes leave a certain loophole in the bill. A Union might, for example, take in a few negroes to give lip service to the requirement and refuse admission to others. However, in view of the status of this proposed legislation and of the importance of labor support for it, I personally think it is all right.<sup>45</sup>

NAACP leaders also agreed not to reveal the names of discriminatory unions to Congress, in order to avoid antagonizing them.<sup>46</sup> Lee writes that “the NAACP grew increasingly wary of challenging union discrimination lest its efforts play into the hand of . . . anti-labor forces” in the late 1940s and early 1950s.<sup>47</sup> However, these considerations influenced NAACP leaders early in the decade.

The Ford Strike of 1941 provided highly visible evidence of the NAACP’s new attitude toward labor.<sup>48</sup> The hitherto anti-union Detroit chapter warned thousands of African Americans not to serve as replacement workers during the strike, and urged the blacks inside the Ford plant to leave. White wrote to the chapter president that blacks need to be aware of “the new order of things” represented by the union.<sup>49</sup> Seven years earlier, he had told Harry Hopkins that open shops were better for black

workers, specifically mentioning Detroit’s automobile industry.<sup>50</sup> After securing a pledge from the United Auto Workers (UAW) to reduce discrimination, White sent a telegram to the local NAACP branch president to continue “full cooperation” with the union.<sup>51</sup>

White’s correspondence during these trying months reveals his perceptions of the changing economic landscape and dilemmas that unions posed. In the wake of the Wagner Act, it seemed that the future of the working class lay with unionized workplaces.<sup>52</sup> To a Cleveland attorney, White wrote that some union would organize Ford and “the Negro worker had the grim choice of casting his lot with the union or having its hostility after they organized.”<sup>53</sup> Since most black Ford employees still voted against the UAW-CIO,<sup>54</sup> the local and national NAACP showed itself leading, rather than reflecting, grassroots opinion. African Americans were not pawns of larger interests; they were making a strategic decision with their eyes wide open to the risks. White acknowledged that supporting the CIO might lose “support . . . among more conservative folks who are pro-Ford” but the branch would “gain more than enough new members among the rank and file.”<sup>55</sup>

Both the NAACP and the CIO took steps to improve relations with each other in the early 1940s. The NAACP altered its organizational identity to include labor interests. At the national level, the NAACP donated money to workers on strike, and urged local chapters to do the same.<sup>56</sup> Goluboff points out that after winning several cases against labor discrimination in the early 1940s, the NAACP withdrew from labor litigation for fear of aiding common political enemies.<sup>57</sup> The NAACP’s new

---

open shops before then. It is true that the NAACP worked primarily with Wagner Act supporters to win passage for the amendment, but that may have simply maximized the chance of its passage. Additionally, it may have been in deference to Senator Wagner, who supported many civil rights policies.

43. Walter White to the Committee on Administration, March 15, 1940, NAACP II-A-443.

44. Walter White to Thurgood Marshall, March 11, 1940, NAACP II-A-443.

45. Memorandum to Dean Hastie, March 14, 1940, NAACP II-A-443.

46. Walter White to Matthew Dunn, May 1940, NAACP II-A-443.

47. Sophie Lee, “Hotspots in a Cold War: The NAACP’s Postwar Workplace Constitutionalism, 1948–1964,” *Law and History Review* 26 (2008): 340.

48. Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW*, 67.

49. Walter White to James McClendon, April 11, 1941, NAACP Mf 13a r3.

50. Walter White to Harry Hopkins, April 26, 1934, NAACP IC-257.

51. Telegram from Walter White to James McClendon, April 5, 1941, NAACP Mf 13a r3.

52. Lichtenstein, *Walter Reuther*; Kenneth I. Kersch, *Constructing Civil Liberties: Discontinuities in the Development of American Constitutional Law* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

53. Walter White to Harry E. Davis, April 17, 1941; NAACP Mf 13a r3. The largest black newspaper in the country, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, wrote that Detroit black leaders “who lean toward the CIO point out that the day of open shops has passed and that the Negro must line up with organized labor” (Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW*, 93). The *Courier* had generally been pro-union but the argument that unions were the only choice was new.

54. David Morgan Lewis Coleman, “African Americans and the Politics of Race among Detroit’s Auto Workers 1941–1971” (PhD diss., University of Iowa, 2001), 40.

55. Patricia Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: New Press, 2010), 258.

56. Memorandum to Roy Wilkins from Clarence Mitchell, NAACP IX-211.

57. Risa Goluboff, *The Lost Promise of Civil Rights* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 217–27.



“labor secretary,” Clarence Mitchell, consistently told black “working people to join bona fide non-segregated labor organizations, to attend the meetings of such organizations, and to be good members in all respects.”<sup>58</sup> From the beginning, Mitchell “perceived the value of coalition-building with organized labor,” and later made great use of these contacts when he directed the Washington Bureau.<sup>59</sup> Frymer describes the labor department as “vigorous in a multitude of venues, lobbying Congress for greater civil rights protections, asking legislators to pay attention to the consequences of closed union shops, working with local NAACP branches around the country to respond to individual cases of discrimination, and working with both national and local unions to target civil rights abuses.”<sup>60</sup> In 1946, the NAACP removed *Nation* publisher Oswald Garrison Villard, the original financier of the NAACP, from the board of trustees partly for his hostility to labor unions.<sup>61</sup> Although a few members complained that the organization was losing its focus by helping organized labor and other liberal groups, membership flourished in the 1940s.<sup>62</sup>

Honoring its new commitment to organized labor, the NAACP favored unions even when doing so meant sacrificing short-term civil rights considerations, ensuring that liberal groups within the Democratic Party moved in tandem. The NAACP was evolving into a multi-issue group. Goluboff contends that the NAACP had “repudiated class issues in the 1940s” and by the 1950s “succeeded in writing class out of their story.” In fact, the Association was so committed to progressive economic policies in the 1940s that they opposed civil rights amendments that threatened the passage of social welfare bills.<sup>63</sup> In the past, the NAACP had opposed social welfare measures such as the National Industrial Recovery Act (Section 7a) and Social Security when adequate safeguards for minority workers had not been included in those bills. In the future, the NAACP would oppose aid to education that did not exclude segregated schools. For most of the 1940s, however, the NAACP opposed antidiscrimination amendments, knowing that these amendments would

cause liberal legislation to fail.<sup>64</sup> Walter White—joined by the CIO—also called for a Conference of Progressives in 1946. At this conference, White favored universal health care and the continuation of rent and price controls.<sup>65</sup> The NAACP vigorously opposed the Taft-Hartley Act, which disempowered unions that practiced discrimination. It would make extensive use of this provision beginning in 1964, but testified against the act in 1947.<sup>66</sup> An in-house exchange read that “it seems that we have a responsibility to keep the Negro community from getting confused on this issue. As you know there is strong feeling in the Negro community that the closed shop is harmful to Negroes.”<sup>67</sup> In the wake of Taft-Hartley, the NAACP sent members to public forums and registered voters to oppose “right to work” laws. AFL-CIO President George Meany thanked the NAACP for its campaigns against right-to-work referendums in 1958 and 1964.<sup>68</sup>

By the mid-1940s, the NAACP not only broadened its mission to economic issues, but also demonstrated clear sympathy for the Democratic Party. While NAACP leaders privately favored New Deal Democrats and progressive causes before 1940,<sup>69</sup> they now made their preferences public and showed more interest in working in a coalition. Worrying that black support for Republicans would isolate their organization from existing and potential allies, President Arthur Spingarn said that “the Negro should align himself with all the liberal forces behind the New Deal,” and if “we in any way attack President Roosevelt (We have got to be realistic) we are helping to elect Dewey and so are cutting ourselves off from all association with liberal forces.”<sup>70</sup> The Republicans made a serious effort to win over black voters in 1944. The nominee, Thomas Dewey, helped

64. After 1949, the NAACP reversed policy and supported federal aid to housing and education only when they were not applied in a discriminatory manner. They were sometimes supported by the UAW and CIO, but opposed by most other liberal groups. See Dona Cooper Hamilton and Charles V. Hamilton, *The Dual Agenda: Race and Social Welfare Policies of Civil Rights Organizations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), chap. 5.

65. Janken, *White*, 306.

66. White needed labor support for new cloture rules necessary to advance civil rights legislation, and appears to have bargained for this help in exchange for the NAACP’s opposition to Taft-Hartley. Robert L. Carter to branch presidents, August 31, 1964, mf supplement to NAACP Part 13, r11; and White to Poppy Cannon White, Series I, Box 12 Folder 113, Walter Francis White and Poppy Cannon Papers. See also Assistant Special Counsel Marian Wynn Perry to Labor Secretary Clarence Mitchell, January 1947, NAACP IX-211.

67. Marian Wynn Perry to Clarence Mitchell, January 27, 1947, NAACP IX 211.

68. George Meany to Roy Wilkins, July 10, 1958, and June 3, 1964, Mf supplement to NAACP Part 13, r11.

69. Wilkins, for instance, recounts that he repeatedly tried to persuade his wife to become a Democrat before the 1928 election. See Roy Wilkins with Tom Matthews, *Standing Fast: The Autobiography of Roy Wilkins* (New York: Da Cap Press, 1994), 80.

70. NAACP Mf Part 1, r11 (f471).

58. Clarence Mitchell to James Longson, February 12, 1953, Box 160, Clarence Mitchell Folder CIO Office of the Secretary Treasurer Records (Detroit: Wayne State University), hereafter CIO Office of the Secretary Treasurer Papers.

59. Gilbert Jonas, *Freedom’s Sword: The NAACP and the Struggle Against Racism in America, 1909–1969* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 237.

60. Paul Frymer, *Black and Blue: African Americans, the Labor Movement, and the Decline of the Democratic Party* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 59.

61. Janken, *White*, 302.

62. See, for example, Madison Jones to Eugene Cheeks, April 6, 1950, NAACP II-A-246.

63. Risa Goluboff, “‘We Live’s in a Free House Such as It Is’: Class and the Creation of Modern Civil Rights,” *U. Penn. L. Rev.* 151 (2003): 1979.

introduce New York's Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC). The ambitious platform favored an anti-poll tax amendment, an antilynching law, desegregation in the armed forces, and a permanent FEPC. The 1944 Democratic Party platform merely contained a vague statement about honoring constitutional rights. Just the same, the NAACP publicly declared that "neither party platform on the Negro is satisfactory to intelligent Negroes." White authored a syndicated column in the *New York Herald* that touted the Democrats over the Republicans. In 1948, he all but endorsed President Truman in his public statements, and when the NAACP board of directors voted on White's behavior, they decided to take no action.<sup>71</sup> At the same time, the NAACP terminated W.E.B. Du Bois for issuing public statements favorable to the racially liberal third-party candidate Henry Wallace, whom unions strenuously opposed as a spoiler candidate.<sup>72</sup> By 1952, the NAACP participated in an informal caucus of groups, including the CIO, which plotted strategy to move the 1952 Democratic platform in a liberal direction.<sup>73</sup>

Like any other partnership, the commitment of both the NAACP and CIO to each other's agendas wavered. Antidiscrimination pledges among unions were seldom enforced, and the CIO failed to address racism at an institutional level, viewing it as a problem of individual members. Many white members of affiliated unions went on "hate strikes" when black workers were promoted. Nevertheless, the NAACP muted its criticisms, and even in-house conversations show consistent support. During the Packard "hate strike" of 1943, White placed the blame entirely on the management rather than the white laborers. Although he was aware of the instigating role that white workers had played in the strike, he chose to side with the UAW leadership and omit labor's role.<sup>74</sup> When the CIO purged more than a million members during the postwar Red Scare, it lost many of its most racially progressive leaders,

71. Against the advice of CIO Secretary Treasurer James Carey, the NAACP refrained from officially endorsing candidates, but its preferences were still voiced in an oblique manner. Roy Wilkins to James Carey, June 14, 1944, CIO Office of the Secretary Treasurer Papers 160. Also see Walter White to Phillip Murray, July 25, 1948; and James Carey to Walter White, August 13, 1946, both in CIO Office of the Secretary Treasurer Papers 27. Also see Simon Topping, "Supporting our Friends and Defeating Our Enemies: Militancy and Nonpartisanship in the NAACP, 1936–1948," *Journal of African American History* 89 (Winter 2004): 23.

72. Janken, *White*, 316–17.

73. The caucus included ADA, the CIO, the Farmer's Union, and a few liberal members of Congress. Violet Gunther to William Rafski, June 10, 1952, mf 21, in Jack Ericson, ed., *Americans for Democratic Action Papers, 1932–1965* (Sanford, NC: Microfilming Corporation of America), hereafter ADA.

74. Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW*, 191. The UAW was subsequently able to minimize the harm and pushed for federal intervention that ended the strike (172).

including unions that had taken the most steps to prevent hate strikes.<sup>75</sup> The national organization even sided with racists to defeat Communist factions in some locals. This, too, failed to strain the alliance; in fact, the NAACP applauded the Communist purge and conducted one of its own.<sup>76</sup>

In 1959, NAACP Labor Secretary Herbert Hill castigated the AFL-CIO for failing to meet several extended deadlines to address segregation at an institutional level. But for most of the decade, the NAACP remained hopeful and enthusiastic. In the past, Hill told black workers with grievances that the first steps in promoting fair practices were to join a union and become active members.<sup>77</sup> Union leaders Philip Murray, Walter Reuther, and George Meany were publicly honored by the NAACP many times and NAACP leaders spoke enthusiastically at labor conventions. Even in 1957, Hill wrote in the NAACP's annual report that "A close day-to-day working relationship between the NAACP and the organized labor movement was an important aspect of the Association's labor program."<sup>78</sup> Polls showed that African Americans viewed labor unions in an increasingly positive light over the 1950s even as the general public viewed them with increasing suspicion.<sup>79</sup> By the time the NAACP was willing to publicly clash with the AFL-CIO, the place of the NAACP among liberal organizations—and the place of civil rights in Democratic Party politics—was secure. The strategy set in motion in 1940 had worked, so it seemed.

The CIO-NAACP alliance solidified the NAACP's reputation as the nation's most prestigious civil rights organization. It helped to isolate other civil rights organizations, including groups that they had originally funded.<sup>80</sup> In the early 1950s, the CIO provided essential funding for the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, which many regard as the most important achievement in the NAACP's history. The NAACP ended 1952 with an operating deficit of \$34,000 and sought to raise \$100,000 in 1953 to prepare for whatever decision the Supreme Court made. The CIO readily advised the NAACP on which local unions and individuals were likely to be sympathetic to fundraising drives.<sup>81</sup> The NAACP raised \$2,500 from the CIO in 1953 and \$75,000

75. Zieger, *The CIO, 1935–1955* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 160, 253–55.

76. Zieger, *The CIO*, 282; Paul Frymer, "Race's Reality: The NAACP Confronts Racism and Inequality in the Labor Movement, 1940–65," in *Race and American Political Development*, ed. Joseph Lowndes, Julie Novkov, and Dorian Warren (New York: Routledge), 190.

77. Frymer, "Race's Reality," 188–89.

78. Jonas, *Freedom's Sword*, 255.

79. Robert Zieger, *For Jobs and Freedom: Race and Labor in America Since 1865* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 2637.

80. John Brophy to Philip Connelly, November 26, 1946, *Operation Dixie* mf 26.

81. Memorandum from Herbert Hill to Walter White, April 20, 1953, NAACP II-A-347.

from the Philip Murray Memorial Foundation (headed by longtime CIO operative James Carey) in 1954.<sup>82</sup>

In summary, the NAACP became far more vocal in its support for labor rights, economic progressivism, and New Deal Democrats in the 1940s. The timing of the NAACP shift closely precedes the Democratic Party's first major concessions and the change of blacks from swing voters to strong Democratic Party identifiers. (See Figure 2) Events occurring between 1937 and 1941 made a CIO-NAACP alliance more palatable, even pressing, than it would have been in the past. In participating in an alliance with the CIO, the NAACP addressed both community-level concerns, such as employment opportunities, and national political concerns, such as civil rights legislation. The CIO had a different balance of local and national concerns.

While other allies were available to the NAACP, it saw working with the CIO as the best overall way of becoming a working-class organization, influencing politics, and integrating workplaces. Business interest groups had not shown the willingness to donate money that would match the contributions of labor unions. Even if they had, they lacked the manpower to assist with membership drives, voter registration, and workplace integration efforts.<sup>83</sup> The National Urban League's (NUL) history provides evidence that relying heavily on business donations would have likely been a suboptimal organizational strategy for the NAACP. The NUL received much of its funding from employers and cautious white philanthropists, and had a much more difficult time influencing unions to integrate. In 1934, it set up "Workers' Councils" to train blacks to establish and join unions and fight against discriminatory unions. Many affiliates refused to cooperate because of the tensions the councils produced with donors. In the end, the councils had less impact on union discrimination than the NAACP had, even though employment was an organizational niche for the NUL.<sup>84</sup> NUL Assistant Executive Secretary Lester Granger admitted in 1947 that legislation was a more effective solution than promoting integration in the workplace on a voluntary basis.<sup>85</sup>

82. George Weaver to Robert Birchmann, June 12, 1954, NAACP II A347. The NAACP raised another \$25,000 from the CIO, the Steelworkers, and other union sources in 1953 (Walter White to James Carey, April 28, 1953, NAACP II A347; Walter White to George Meany, April 17, 1953, NAACP II A347). The CIO also filed an amicus brief in *Brown*.

83. David Truman, *The Governmental Process: Political Interests and Public Opinion* (Berkeley, CA: Institute of Governmental Studies, 1951).

84. The NAACP agreed in 1914 that the NUL would focus on employment and the NAACP on legal rights (Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln*, 282–96).

85. At hearings for the FEPC, he said that the threat of government intervention greatly improved his organization's ability to provide job placement services. See Lester Granger's testimony to

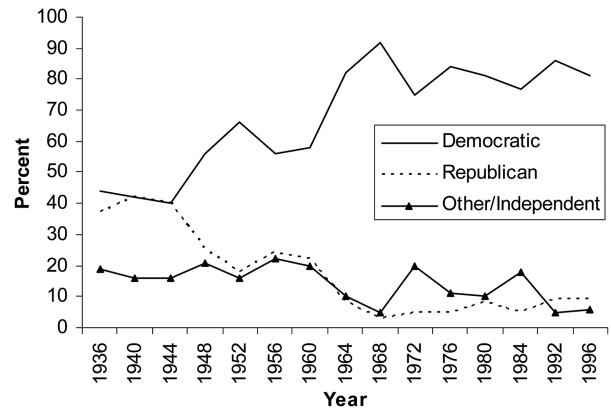


Fig. 2. African American Party Identification.

Source: David A. Bositis, "Blacks and the 2004 Democratic National Convention," Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, Table 1, Presidential Vote and Party Identification of Black Americans, 1936–2000, 9. Bositis obtained early data from Ladd and Hadley, *Transformations of the American Party System*, 112.

If the NAACP were allied with business, rather than labor, it would have had difficulty pushing for the FEPC.<sup>86</sup> Business might have been more receptive to fighting government discrimination against African Americans than to the FEPC, which regulated private employers. But even in the domain of government discrimination, most businesses showed themselves less willing than unions to fund the fight for civil rights. When the NAACP lobbied against discrimination in federally subsidized housing in 1954, few businesses joined the battle. The government financed thousands of homes that excluded blacks, such as Levittown, Pennsylvania, and would often clear black neighborhoods and exclude them from the new neighborhoods. The National Association of Real Estate Brokers supported the NAACP's position and asked Eisenhower to instruct housing agencies to revise their housing policies. Unlike organized labor, however, the Association did not provide funding for the NAACP or aid its lobbying effort in Congress.<sup>87</sup>

## THE CIO'S INTEREST IN CIVIL RIGHTS

The NAACP's overtures to the CIO would not have mattered if the CIO did not have a comparable interest in the alliance. The CIO was both a professional interest group, protecting its member interests, and an

the President's Committee on Civil Rights, April 17, 1947, CIO Office of the Secretary Treasurer Papers 42.

86. Karol, *Party Position Change in American Politics*.

87. While the federal government paid to relocate the black families, they were paid, on average, \$2,000 less than white families. Most real estate groups opposed efforts to attach antidiscrimination amendments to federal housing bills. Watson, *Lion in the Lobby*, 250–56.



ideological group in the sense that it viewed its member interests as tied to a full-employment economy. According to CIO leaders, maintaining the purchasing power of all workers was necessary to protect their own.<sup>88</sup> The CIO could have become an AFL for unskilled workers, with a similar, narrow political agenda. Some of the most able left-wing organizers may have gone elsewhere, and it might have lost the enthusiasm of middle-class liberals. But the union leaders clearly supported a progressive agenda, while union workers often had to be dragged along. The group leaders were able to fuse their followers into a potent political force.

The findings presented in this section are based on written CIO records and secondary sources in labor history. Several labor historians have argued that local labor activists were surprisingly committed to racial egalitarianism and class consciousness; in their view, the CIO would have made more racial progress if only it had more committed leadership.<sup>89</sup> To the contrary, I argue that CIO leadership was sincerely committed to civil rights in the 1940s and 1950s in electoral politics, if not the workplace. The leadership's preferences differed from a large swath of their workers.<sup>90</sup> Even when the CIO merged with the AFL in 1955, the new organization continued to support civil rights and other liberal positions in the Democratic Party, though in a less confrontational manner. The AFL had been moving toward the CIO's ideological position and interest in political causes as the merger approached.<sup>91</sup>

### The CIO's Organizational Interests in Civil Rights

The CIO's labor needs influenced—but did not drive—its political alliance with civil rights groups. Both segregation and integration posed risks from the point of view of organizing more chapters. The CIO endeavored to unionize industrial workers and adopted a nondiscrimination policy in its first constitution in 1938. African Americans formed a sizeable portion of the workforce in some, though not all, unskilled workplaces. If a union did not include African Americans, they might vote against unionizing or vote for a competing union. Even if a discriminatory white union succeeded in organizing a workplace, blacks might serve as replacement

workers and impede the success of strikes.<sup>92</sup> At the same time, workplace considerations do not fully explain the CIO's behavior. Former NAACP Labor Secretary Herbert Hill claims that they did, as have many labor historians.<sup>93</sup> However, the racially conservative AFL had great success in competing with the CIO in unskilled labor markets, while some CIO unions promoted racial equality even where black membership was low.<sup>94</sup> The CIO certainly did not have to promote civil rights legislation or progressive candidates to recruit new workers; African Americans were eager to accept employment where they could find it, whether the union was politically active or not.

In some places, appeals to racial conservatism were effective in winning an organization drive<sup>95</sup>; in other places, the competition caused both unions to take African Americans more seriously.<sup>96</sup> On balance,

92. Paula Pfeffer, *A. Philip Randolph, Pioneer of the Civil Rights Movement* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 26. Also see Mason's comments in Minutes of Regional Conference of CIO and International Union Directors, 10/12/1942, *Operation Dixie* 64. Black replacement workers could provoke race riots, which could lead to state repression of a strike (Noel Beddow to Philip Murray, July 12, 1943, Box 42, Folder 15, Philip Murray Papers (Washington, DC: Catholic University), hereafter Philip Murray Papers).

93. Herbert Hill, "The Problem of Race in American Labor History," *Reviews in American History* 24 (June 1996): 201–2; and Orley Ashenfelter, "Racial Discrimination and Trade Unionism," *Journal of Political Economy* 80 (May/June 1972): 440–41.

94. L. Frank Weyher, "Rival Unions, the Politics of Race, and Interracial Equality: The CIO vs. the AFL, 1935–1950" (PhD diss., 2003). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses AAT 3133100. Also see Maurice Zeitlin and L. Frank Weyher, "Black and White, Unite and Fight: Interracial Working-Class Solidarity and Racial Employment Equality," *American Journal of Sociology* 107 (September 2001); Donald Critchlow, "Communist Unions and Racism," *Labor History* 17 (Spring 1976); Mark McCulloch, "The Shop-Floor Dimension of Union Rivalry: The Case of Westinghouse in the 1950s," in *The CIO's Left-Led Unions*, ed. Steven Rosswurm (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992); Toni Gilpin, "Left by Themselves: A History of the United Farm Equipment and Metal Workers Union, 1938–1955" (PhD diss., 1992); and Michael Goldfield, "Race and the CIO: The Possibilities for Racial Egalitarianism During the 1930s and 1940s," *International Labor and Working Class History* 44 (Fall 1993): 22.

95. When steelworkers in Birmingham, Alabama, were accused of bigotry in 1950, President Philip Murray ordered desegregation of all facilities. The southern director of Steelworkers reported that white workers signed a petition to quit the union if the order was enforced, and if the AFL learned of their dissatisfaction, it would take over "lock, stock, and barrel." Not only did Murray retreat from the order, but he also cancelled a civil rights conference in Birmingham at the director's suggestion. See R.E. Farr to Philip Murray, May 19, 1950, Box 36, Folder 17; see Ernest Wooten to Philip Murray, June 2, 1950, Philip Murray Papers Box 36, File 18; and Francis C. Shane to Philip Murray, May 23, 1950, Philip Murray Papers Box 36, File 17. Cf. Draper, *Conflict of Interests*. Draper finds that in the post-1950 period, courageous labor leaders lost their base of support among southern workers by supporting desegregation.

96. See Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights: Organizing Memphis Workers*, 85–87; Herbert Northrup, *Organized Labor and the Negro* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1976), 14–15, 233–37; and Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

88. Zieger, *The CIO, 1935–1955*, 215–16 and 314–17.

89. For example, see Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights*, and Robert Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism*.

90. See Draper, *Conflict of Interests*; Kevin Boyle, *The UAW and the Heyday of American Liberalism, 1945–1968* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); and Zieger, *The CIO*, 374.

91. Their platforms nearly converged. Daniel Cornfield and Holly McCammon, "Approaching Merger: The Converging Public Policy Agendas of the AFL and CIO, 1938–1955," in *Strategic Alliances: Coalition Building and Social Movements*, ed. Nella Van Dyke and Holly McCammon (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

competition between the CIO and AFL seems to have had a positive impact for black workers.<sup>97</sup> The competition elevated the NAACP's role in the workplace, since it played an important role in many elections. Tacit approval could often decide which union African Americans would support.<sup>98</sup> As the South urbanized from 1931 to 1954, the southern wing of the NAACP grew faster than either black churches or colleges by several institutional measures (northern branches also grew, but to a lesser degree). The national organization was able to influence its local branches with a high degree of tactical uniformity.<sup>99</sup>

The leadership of the CIO pressured its skilled and unskilled unions to integrate, but did not adopt integrationist policies based on economic interests alone.<sup>100</sup> Persuading local chapters to give up segregated facilities or open all trades without regard to race was an absorbing task that often failed. Even in the left-wing UAW, most southern and border state regional directors used their influence to maintain segregation in their regions.<sup>101</sup> CIO leaders opted to push racial integration along where they could, though their efforts were not as extensive as some civil rights advocates would have liked.<sup>102</sup>

### The CIO's Political Interests in Civil Rights

It is not clear that the CIO needed to address workplace discrimination and support civil rights to organize its workplaces, but it needed to do both in order to carry out its political agenda. African Americans were part of the CIO's strategy to influence politics in a favorable direction.<sup>103</sup> As with politicians who logroll, interest groups gain political advantages through an alliance even if they have nothing in common, but if they do have something

in common, the alliance will be stronger.<sup>104</sup> Unions and racial minorities had a common interest in voting rights, since voting restrictions affected both blacks and working-class whites. Moreover, both had a common interest in "civil rights," which referred to the federal protection of the rights of union organizers and free association, and not just the rights of racial minorities.<sup>105</sup> Federal protection was essential when many southern police routinely harassed organizers, as White pointed out to CIO-PAC founder Sidney Hillman in 1940.<sup>106</sup> The wartime FEPC, strongly favored by civil rights groups, helped the CIO because it documented abuses of civil rights by its rival, the AFL.<sup>107</sup> While serving on the President's Committee on Civil Rights (PCCR), CIO Secretary Treasurer James Carey fought unsuccessfully for the report to include the names of discriminatory AFL unions.<sup>108</sup>

Most CIO leaders saw the Democratic Party as the best political vessel for their interests, and hoped that African Americans would join them to influence the party based on their common interests. CIO-PAC founder Sidney Hillman believed that labor's corporatist gains during World War II depended on liberal Democrats remaining in power and the CIO obtaining a permanent role among the highest strategists and policymakers in the party. Hillman claimed that labor groups wielded considerable strength in party nominations in 1943, before the CIO-PAC was fully organized:

The Democratic Party is very open to the proposition of giving our groups a great deal of say right in the party—not merely on policies, but a discussion of the kind of people they are going to nominate before they nominate them. I think if we have real leadership we can work out, especially with the Democratic Party, some satisfactory arrangements so that we do not really have a choice between two evils. After my trip I have seen some of the top leadership of the Democratic Party, and I

97. L. Frank Weyher, *Rival Unions, the Politics of Race, and Interracial Equality: The CIO vs. the AFL, 1935–1950* (PhD diss., 2003). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses AAT 3133100.

98. Both the AFL and the CIO blamed the NAACP when union members supported one over the other (see William Green to Roy Wilkins, October 22, 1943, and Walter White to William Smith, December 23, 1943, both in NAACP Mf 13A r15). The NAACP revitalized nearly inactive unions in 1941 and 1947 with North Carolina's Food and Tobacco industries, as well as the Agricultural Workers Local and Boilermakers in San Francisco. See Frymer, *Black and Blue*, 55–56; and "Race's Reality," 187. The CIO also asked the NAACP to recruit members in the South to CIO unions in 1947 (George Weaver to Walter White, April 14, 1953, NAACP II-A-347; see also William Smith to Walter White, April 6, 1949, NAACP II-A-347).

99. Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930–1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 103, 136.

100. For a competing point of view, see Rick Halpern, "Black Workers and the 20<sup>th</sup> Century South: The Emerging Revision," *Social History* 19 (1994): 380.

101. Boyle, *The UAW and the Heyday of American Liberalism*, 114.

102. Frymer, *Black and Blue*, 54–55.

103. Cf. Zieger, *For Jobs and Freedom*, 114.

104. Kathleen Bawn, "Constructing 'Us': Ideology, Coalition Politics and False Consciousness," *American Journal of Political Science* 43 (1999): 303–34.

105. McMahon, *Reconsidering Roosevelt on Race*. As late as 1947, the Presidents Committee on Civil Rights (PCCR) said that "typical 'civil rights' cases involve such varied matters" including "racial, labor, pacifist, and alien rights" ("Federal Criminal Jurisdiction Over Violations of Civil Rights," January 15, 1947, CIO Office of the Secretary Treasurer Papers 41, PCCR).

106. Walter White to Sidney Hillman, April 1, 1940, NAACP Mf 13a r4; Lucy Mason to Molly Dawson, September 6, 1937, *Operation Dixie* mf 62. Union organizers, both African American and white, had been lynched during efforts to unionize the South, and NAACP campaigns against lynching had succeeded in reducing lynching during the 1940s.

107. Zieger, *The CIO*, 158.

108. CARD Minutes, September 17, 1947, CIO Office of the Secretary Treasurer Papers 192.

think there, too, there is a desire to discuss with us before instead of after. You know what happened in New Jersey where, because of the AFL and the CIO and the Brotherhoods working together, we have forced our nominee as the gubernatorial candidate.<sup>109</sup>

Although Hillman had supported third-party efforts in the past, he sought to unite all such efforts into a coherent Democratic Party bloc with the CIO-PAC and scuttle third parties.<sup>110</sup> The CIO's involvement with the Democratic Party took many forms. It consulted with Democratic Party presidents and congressional leaders to suggest appointments, legislation, and political strategy.<sup>111</sup> It contributed funding, voter registration drives, and mobilization efforts to support like-minded candidates in Democratic primaries and defeat Republicans in the general election.<sup>112</sup> Finally, as we will see, both the CIO and affiliated unions influenced large blocs of delegates in nominating conventions.

The CIO viewed the southern wing of the Democratic Party as a hindrance. Southern members of Congress (MCs) began opposing Roosevelt's labor policies before they opposed other liberal economic policies.<sup>113</sup> While their opposition to labor only crystallized in response to related race issues, the CIO threatened other pillars of southern electoral politics. Southern officeholders benefited from elections

that excluded working-class voters of both races with poll taxes and a one-party system.<sup>114</sup> The status quo enabled company towns and government intervention in strikes, and the beneficiaries of this system had ample reason to oppose the CIO regardless of civil rights. Politics aside, the South's low wages and hostility to unions threatened the CIO's ambitions.<sup>115</sup>

CIO research indicated that antilabor MCs were elected in low-turnout elections.<sup>116</sup> African Americans were a large part of this group.<sup>117</sup> CIO activists believed southern blacks were far more likely to vote for progressive legislators.<sup>118</sup> In the North, the CIO feared that African Americans would revert to the Republican Party.<sup>119</sup> Polls attempting to measure party attachment support the view that blacks were divided in their party loyalties as late as 1944 (see Figure 2). In the 1946 midterm elections, the Democratic Party lost between 16 and 50 percent of the support it had received in black communities in 1944.<sup>120</sup> CIO-PAC Director Jack Kroll and other CIO leaders also worried about third parties that appealed to blacks, especially Henry Wallace's racially liberal Progressive Party. By adopting an agenda broader than labor rights and transforming the Democratic Party, the CIO-PAC could convince union workers, volunteers, and liberals outside of the labor movement that the CIO-PAC and the Democratic Party were visionary organizations that obviated the need for a third party. Civil rights were part of this agenda. Internal memos revealed that leaders adopted long-range, broadly progressive goals in part to attract non-union liberals and meet "the demands of those who seek to push us into third

109. Meeting of October 29, 1943, mf 6 in Robert Zieger, ed., *Minutes of the Executive Board of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, 1935–1955* (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America), hereafter *Minutes of the Executive Board*.

110. While Hillman was still active in the American Labor Party and the Labor Non-Partisan League, he largely arranged for them to take direction from Roosevelt, consolidating various left-wing splinter factions behind New Deal Democrats and even endorsing a conservative Democrat for governor of New York. By 1946, many in the CIO once again considered a third party more thoroughly tied to labor. Nelson Lichtenstein argues there was not a consensus against a third party until Henry Wallace's third-party challenge in "The Eclipse of Social Democracy," in *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930–1980*, ed. Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 138–39.

111. On appointments, see George Weaver to Philip Murray, April 19, 1951, CIO Office of the Secretary Treasurer Papers 154, Philip Murray Folder, and Frank McNaughton to Bob Hagy, November 12, 1948, McNaughton Reports File, (Independence, Missouri: Harry S. Truman Library), hereafter Truman Library. For examples of legislative strategy, see Report of the Director, September 7, 1949, CIO Office of the Secretary Treasurer Papers 79, CARD 1949; and CARD Minutes, January 14, 1950, CIO Office of the Secretary Treasurer Papers 193, Civil Rights Meeting Folder.

112. James Caldwell Foster, *The Union Politic: The CIO Political Action Committee* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1975), 28; Fraser, *Labor Will Rule*, 514; Jack Kroll, Report on 1948, Box 4, Jack Kroll Papers (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress), hereafter Jack Kroll Papers; and Lucy Mason to Jack Jenkins, July 14 1949, *Operation Dixie* mf 63. Also see Draper, *Conflict of Interests*, 86–93.

113. Farhang and Katznelson, "The Southern Imposition."

114. Gerard Friedman, "The Political Economy of Early Southern Unionism: Race, Politics, and Labor in the South, 1880–1953," *Journal of Economic History* 60 (2000): 2.

115. Lucy Randolph Mason, The CIO and the South, undated 1941, *Operation Dixie* mf 65. Also see Maxwell Cobbe to Walter White, August 14, 1939, *Operation Dixie* mf 62; Victor Rotrum to Lucy Randolph Mason, May 17, 1944, *Operation Dixie* mf 62.

116. Proposed letter describing the plan for National Roosevelt Clubs, undated, Philip Murray Papers Box 131, Folder 5; CIO Department of Education and Research, "When the People Vote—They Win!" *Economic Outlook* 7 (June 1946); Statement on Political Policy, 1948, Box 12, Folder 6, John Brophy Papers (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University).

117. In Mississippi, twenty-six counties had an African American majority, and many of the most antilabor legislators came from those counties. Lucy Mason, "Reasons white workers should welcome Negroes into Unions," May 23, 1945, *Operation Dixie* mf 63. Also see Lucy Mason, "The CIO and the South," March 1944, *Operation Dixie* mf 64.

118. Lucy Mason to P Murray, October 30, 1944, *Operation Dixie* mf 63; George Crockett, "Labor Looks Ahead," *Michigan Chronicle*, January 26, 1946.

119. Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln*; and Karol, *Party Position Change in American Politics*, 109–33.

120. Scott James, "A Theory of Presidential Commitment and Opportunism: Swing States, Pivotal Groups and Civil Rights under Truman and Clinton," presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association (1997), 15.



party adventures.”<sup>121</sup> The CIO-PAC influenced the development of other organizations that would rally non-union members to broad liberal causes, where labor rights and civil rights were subsets of the organizations’ goals.<sup>122</sup> The most important such fledgling organization was Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), which helped to pass the civil rights plank at the 1948 Democratic Convention.

The decision to support civil rights did not mean that the CIO had to side with the NAACP in particular. But the CIO did. The NAACP proved, time and again, that it was a “team player.” It was willing to mute its criticisms of organized labor, support civil rights policies sensitive to labor concerns, and oppose Henry Wallace’s third-party crusade. It even opposed Communist proposals to have separate seniority rules for blacks, which would have opened better jobs for African Americans who were only recently allowed into unions.<sup>123</sup> Both organizations advised each other on locations in which they were likely to find new members or sympathetic allies. The NAACP helped the CIO contact black churches to recruit blacks for political purposes.<sup>124</sup> The allies’ lobbyists collaborated on many of the same bills and their lawyers filed amicus briefs for the same cases. Both organizations worked together to abolish poll taxes at the state level. The NAACP embarrassed labor’s foremost congressional opponent, Senator Robert Taft, in an election year. When Taft opposed a “compulsory” FEPC in favor of one that merely publicized cases of discrimination, he tried to claim that a high-ranking official at the NAACP preferred his version. The NAACP repeatedly called upon him to name that official in public. Executive Secretary White wrote to the CIO that “I

am delighted that we have caught him in such a vicious distortion of the truth and you may be sure that we are going to follow it through to the end.”<sup>125</sup>

In addition, the NAACP was arguably more responsible than any other single organization for quadrupling the number of black voters in the South from 1940 to 1954. Newly registered black voters were important for unseating antilabor members of Congress and holding southern states for Adlai Stevenson in 1952.<sup>126</sup> In 1944, NAACP litigation led the Supreme Court to reverse a nine-year-old precedent and invalidate white primaries. The NAACP subsequently offered rewards for local chapters that registered the most voters, and bestowed a \$50 prize for a Louisiana chapter that registered over 600 black voters in 1947. Historian John Kirk argues that in Arkansas, the NAACP was the most significant factor in increasing black voter registration from 4,000 to 47,000 between 1940 and 1947.<sup>127</sup> The Association and its local branches were officially nonpartisan, and could not tell new voters whom to support. But they helped coordinate (and in some cases, create) independent local groups that registered voters and endorsed liberal candidates sympathetic to civil rights. Among the groups were the Georgia Association of Citizens Democratic Clubs, the Mississippi Progressive Voters League, the Florida Progressive Voters League, and the Jefferson County Progressive Democratic Council in Birmingham.<sup>128</sup> The NAACP also helped some of these organizations sue election boards that impeded registration efforts.<sup>129</sup>

Two episodes demonstrate the CIO’s willingness to help the NAACP stay at the forefront of civil rights

121. Jack Kroll, “Memorandum to President Philip Murray Regarding Long Range PAC Objectives,” 1949, Philip Murray Papers Box 133 Folder 12; Foster, *The Union Politic*, 135.

122. Kroll’s predecessor, Sidney Hillman, created the National Citizens PAC (NCPAC) in 1944 to push the CIO program among middle-class people unlikely to donate to labor unions. NCPAC “provided an entrée for the CIO into diverse segments of the population not reachable directly through the trade union movement” (Fraser, *Labor Will Rule*, 515).

123. Director’s Report, August 16, 1944, CIO Office of the Secretary Treasurer Papers 196. One exception seems to have taken place in 1953, when the NAACP supported a bill to forbid discrimination only where unions are the bargaining agents. The Committee to Abolish Racial Discrimination (CARD) argued that labor opponents would use the law to discourage unionization in the South, and the NAACP should wait for a bill that prohibits both union and employer discrimination. In a heated exchange, the NAACP said that such a bill had no chance of passing. The CIO said that the NAACP “should have known better” (CARD Minutes, May 12, 1953, CIO Office of the Secretary Treasurer Papers 193).

124. Report of PAC 1951, August 14, 1951, Jack Kroll Papers Box 7, page 10. The CIO also mobilized women. While upper-class women generally voted, working-class housewives did not, and the CIO wrote union literature encouraging husbands to talk to their wives as well as guides to voting geared toward women (Jack Kroll to Philip Murray, March 8, 1948, Philip Murray Papers, Box 133, Folder 4).

125. Walter White to Jack Kroll, June 30, 1950, NAACP II A246 1950.

126. Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice*, 328; Henry Lee Moon, “Suffrage 52–53,” NAACP II A452.

127. John Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line: Black Activism in Little Rock, Arkansas, 1940–1970* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), 31.

128. Steven Lawson, *Black Ballots: Voting Rights in the South, 1944–1969* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 125–26, 129. Lawson argues that while union officials were active in voter registration efforts, the rank-and-file was not (127).

129. Lawson, *Running for Freedom*, 57–58. NAACP efforts often fell short in rural areas. In some areas, Communists fared better at voter registration. In Winston-Salem, the heavily Communist Food, Tobacco, Agricultural and Allied Workers bypassed the NAACP and registered black voters until they constituted 30 percent of the electorate (Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights*; and Halpern, “Black Workers and the 20<sup>th</sup> Century South,” 361). It is worth mentioning that Communists did not uniformly outperform moderates and liberals on civil rights; Lichtenstein, for example, notes that Communists softened their critique of segregation in a Miami union to maintain power (Alex Lichtenstein, “Scientific Unionism’ and the ‘Negro Question’: Communists and the Transport Workers Union in Miami, 1944–1949,” in *Southern Labor in Transition, 1940–1995*, ed. Robert Zieger (Knoxville: University Press of Tennessee, 1997), 59–60. Also see Meier and Rudwick, “Communist Unions and the Black Community: The Case of the Transport Workers Union, 1934–1944,” *Labor History* 23 (1982): 196–97; and Korstad and Lichtenstein, “Opportunities Lost and Found,” 791.

groups. MOWM leader A. Philip Randolph, who also led the National Council for a Permanent FEPC, prioritized the desegregation of the armed forces over the FEPC, and worked with Senator Taft on both issues. When Randolph was willing to settle for an FEPC without enforcement powers, the NAACP's Walter White and the CIO's James Carey contacted other groups in the Council and persuaded them to let the NAACP take over the FEPC fight.<sup>130</sup> When a Los Angeles CIO affiliate worked with the National Negro Congress, the national CIO strongly rebuked it, warning that "the organization with which we work very closely and successful is the NAACP" and that the chapter must discontinue its support of rivals or be in violation of rules passed by the governing council.<sup>131</sup>

Would the CIO have transformed the Democratic Party on civil rights regardless of what the NAACP did? Probably not. First of all, the CIO would have grown less as a union. The NAACP assisted CIO membership and fundraising drives, and advised CIO locals on how to minimize racial discord in biracial workplaces. Second, the NAACP attested that civil rights measures favored by the CIO were authentic civil rights measures with widespread support among blacks. The NAACP cast doubt on the propriety of measures that sought to place the burden of integration on unions rather than employers, such as the Taft-Hartley Act. Finally, many political organizations have acted against their own interest by acceding to racial division, and the CIO might have chosen to follow in their footsteps. CIO workers would have easily been diverted away from civil rights if the most prestigious voice of civil rights in the nation undermined them. In one southern union that attempted to foster racial tolerance among members in 1946 an organizer found white members very resistant because of the local African American newspaper's steady opposition to the CIO.<sup>132</sup> Frymer shows the result of division such as this on a broader scale. When unions rejected NAACP recommendations for integration in the 1960s, the NAACP turned to the courts with their grievances, weakening union treasuries and seniority rules. NAACP litigation increased racial resentment in unions, led union members to support conservative politicians in some cases, and fractured the Democratic Party coalition.<sup>133</sup> Projecting Frymer's findings back in time, it is hard to imagine that the CIO-PAC or its liberal allies would have prioritized civil rights if the NAACP worked against unions or Democrats. For the CIO to prioritize civil rights with

the assent of its members, the NAACP had to support unions without hesitation.

Given that support for civil rights would help remove the threat of black replacement workers and elect progressive politicians, the CIO consciously chose to promote workplace integration, lobby for civil rights, and work closely with the NAACP. Southern Public Relations Director for the CIO Lucy Mason Randolph argued that "a square deal on the part of white workers for Negro workers means that both will be interested in the same qualified candidates for public office and will vote together."<sup>134</sup> The national CIO created a "Committee to Abolish Racial Discrimination" (CARD) in 1942. By 1945, one hundred state and local CARD committees existed among CIO unions.<sup>135</sup>

Workplace integration alone had implications for politics, as many black workers voted in a one-person, one-vote system for the first time,<sup>136</sup> and Jim Crow politics arguably rested upon the separation of workers by race.<sup>137</sup> Some CIO unions implemented racially progressive policies before the NAACP took an interest in labor. However, the CIO did not implement institution-wide solutions such as a CARD until after the NAACP made an effort to cooperate. Hillman's biographer writes that "his approach" to union integration "was to equivocate and placate." As a CIO operative working for the Roosevelt administration, Hillman's wartime "construction and shipbuilding stabilization agreements froze in place the all-white practices of the craft unions."<sup>138</sup>

With the creation of CARD, the CIO attempted to rectify union-wide injustices with varying success. Just as the NAACP tried to socialize its members to favor organized labor, CARD attempted to socialize its workers into favoring civil rights. A CIO conference on civil rights said that integration needed to be "sold to the CIO membership in the same manner as wage increases, shorter work week or any other benefit of trade unionism." Some pamphlets emphasized that

134. Lucy Mason Randolph, "Reasons white workers should welcome Negroes into unions," May 23, 1943, *Operation Dixie* mf 63.

135. Zieger, *The CIO*, 157. The AFL was slower to recruit blacks and support civil rights, but ultimately generously funded efforts to pass a FEPC and provided the NAACP with access to elected officials in the 1940s. The wartime FEPC helped expose discrimination in the AFL and strengthened the CIO's claim as a friend of African Americans (Zieger, *The CIO*, 158). The AFL actually donated more money to the National Council for a Permanent FEPC. See Louis Kesselman, *The Social Politics of FEPC: A Study in Reform Pressure Movements* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1948).

136. Nelson has argued that "The very presence of the union on the shop floor encouraged black workers to be conscious of their rights in a way that had never been possible before," with one-man, one-vote union elections and procedures for redress of grievances. Black union activists created a new class of community leaders. Nelson, *Divided We Stand*, 197; Korstad and Lichtenstein, "Opportunities Lost and Found," 787; and Zieger, *The CIO*, 153.

137. Robert Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism*, 58.

138. Fraser, *Labor Will Rule*, 478.

130. Watson, *Lion in the Lobby*, 166.

131. John Brophy to Philip Connelly, November 26, 1946, *Operation Dixie* mf 26.

132. Berkeley Watterson to Roy Wilkins, November 25, 1946, NAACP II-A-347.

133. Frymer, *Black and Blue*.

discrimination was unfair and un-American, but economic benefits were also stressed: a popular pamphlet was entitled “Discrimination Costs You Money.”<sup>139</sup> CARD discussed highlighting the role of blacks in World War II and unions to foster interracial solidarity. Their newsletters featured stories about employers approaching black workers offering paid positions as “scabs,” and the blacks dutifully turning down the offers.<sup>140</sup> One CIO pamphlet featured a cover with three workers—one black, one Asian, and one white—on the cover.<sup>141</sup> Civil rights were integrated into CIO summer school curriculums, although summer schools were typically attended by those already enthusiastic about the national CIO’s mission. In 1950, the national CIO directed all locals to disobey state and local laws requiring segregation, since it considered them unconstitutional. Clearly, by asserting a civil rights jurisprudence ahead of the Supreme Court, the CIO was exceeding mere token or symbolic support for civil rights.<sup>142</sup>

These efforts were a visible improvement from the 1930s, when neither CARD nor the CIO-PAC existed. Although the CIO professed its commitment to interracial organizing in the beginning, only a few of its affiliates, such as the United Mine Workers, consistently pushed forward racial progress after the organizing drives were over.<sup>143</sup> Even left-wing unions such as the Steelworkers and Garment Workers oscillated in their commitment. The CIO chose to begin its southern organization in the 1930s with lily-white textile unions to avoid being seen in the South as a racially progressive union.<sup>144</sup>

Of course, historians debate the economic benefits unions provided to African Americans in the 1940s as well.<sup>145</sup> They question whether CARD and other steps

taken by the CIO to address discrimination in its own ranks were adequate. CARD developed model antidiscrimination contracts that were seldom adopted, let alone enforced, by affiliates.<sup>146</sup> CIO leaders tended to view racism as a problem of uncooperative members, rather than institutional problems entrenched in seniority rules and the culture at large. If Murray, Reuther, and Meany did not think a rising tide for union workers could resolve most racial issues, integration at least had to take a back seat to full employment, union rights, and class issues more generally.<sup>147</sup> When the CIO purged Communist members and locals, they removed factions committed to addressing racism at an institutional level. Anti-Communist CIO leaders often addressed civil rights concerns in order to minimize Communist recruitment among black workers.<sup>148</sup> With the purge, this incentive to address black grievances was removed. Willard Townsend, who consistently sided with anti-Communist union factions, claimed that the Communists “did keep the civil rights question alive, even though we recognized why they were doing so.”<sup>149</sup> Politically, the CIO kept quiet about civil rights in places where it would be a liability for organizing drives. While southern CIO-PACs were politically active, the CIO preferred that organizers sent to unionize new workplaces keep a low profile politically.<sup>150</sup> CIO leaders declared that “Operation Dixie” would be “purely an organizational campaign,” with “no extra curricular activities—no politics . . . no FEPC.”<sup>151</sup>

139. Report of the Panel on Publicity and Education Techniques, CIO Office of the Secretary Treasurer Papers 79, Committee to Abolish Racial Discrimination, 1947–48 Folder.

140. CARD Minutes, March 13, 1945, CIO Office of the Secretary Treasurer Papers 192.

141. One southern employer requested copies of this and used it to defeat a CIO election, saying the CIO was trying to abolish Jim Crow. CARD Minutes, February 11, 1947, CIO Office of the Secretary Treasurer Papers 192.

142. Arthur Goldberg to all regional CIO Directors, April 24, 1950, CIO Office of the Secretary Treasurer Papers 193.

143. Michael Goldfield, “Race and the CIO: The Possibilities for Racial Egalitarianism during the 1930s and 1940s,” *International Labor and Working Class History* 44 (1993): 1–32; Nelson, *Divided We Stand*, 190.

144. Zieger, *The CIO*, 77.

145. Some argue that the civil rights programs were window-dressing designed to cloak workplace discrimination. A black steelworker in Youngstown assigned to his local civil rights committee was told never to “touch the jobs in the plant.” Racially conservative locals also refused to follow instructions from the national union. See Bruce Nelson, “‘CIO Meant One Thing for the Whites and Another Thing for Us’: Steelworkers and Civil Rights, 1936–1974,” in *Southern Labor in Transition, 1940–1995*, ed. Robert Zieger (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 117–18. Smelter workers in Butte, Montana, told CIO President Phil Murray to “go to Hell” when he told them to hire black workers

during World War II. See Boris Shishkin’s remarks in the President’s Civil Rights Committee Meeting, September 12, 1947, CIO Office of the Secretary Treasurer Papers 42, p. 857. Secretary Treasurer James Carey responded that no blacks were employed in Butte four years ago but blacks are employed now.

146. Zieger, *The CIO*, 157.

147. Frymer, “Race’s Reality,” 185; Nelson, *Divided We Stand*, 202.

148. Lucy Mason to Eleanor Roosevelt, August 19, 1950, *Operation Dixie* mf 64; George Weaver to Cy W. Record, December 16, 1949, CIO Office of the Secretary Treasurer Papers 188, General Correspondence Folder. Also see Memorandum from George Weaver to James Carey, 1953, CIO Office of the Secretary Treasurer Papers 71; Noel Beddow to Philip Murray, April 27, 1943, Philip Murray Papers, Box 42, Folder 14; Notes on Meeting Held Saturday Morning [sic], July 10, 1943, in office of Noel R. Beddow, Philip Murray Papers Box 42, Folder 15; and Noel Beddow to Philip Murray, September 27, 1943, Box 42 Folder 15. UAW President Walter Reuther realized that civil rights was a recruiting tool for his more left-wing rivals, and expanded the UAW’s Fair Practices Committee to preempt future opposition. See David M. Lewis-Colman, *Race against Liberalism: Black Workers and the UAW in Detroit* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 47.

149. Willard Townsend to Robert Oliver (Assistant to the CIO President), February 12, 1956, CIO Office of the Secretary Treasurer Papers 190, Willard Townsend Folder.

150. Mr. J. Dameron to E.L. Sandfuer, December 3, 1947, *Operation Dixie* mf 66.

151. Zieger, *For Jobs and Freedom*, 161.



Whatever the real benefits of their alliance with the CIO by the 1940s, the NAACP at the time publicly commended the commitment of CIO leaders and its steps to address workplace integration.<sup>152</sup> Union integration programs and visible support for the NAACP earned the goodwill of many blacks toward the CIO. Limited progress in the workplace did not prevent African Americans from supporting the CIO's political agenda. Nor did it prevent their ascendance in the Democratic Party. Beginning with the 1948 platform, the party's symbolic commitments to African Americans exceeded any party's commitment to them since Reconstruction. Substantively, the party began addressing their concerns with the desegregation of the armed forces in 1948 and culminating with the Civil Rights Act of 1964. By the end of the 1940s, African Americans, for the first time, were more supportive of the Democratic Party than white workers (see Figures 1 and 2). The CIO's failure to address Jim Crow in its own house arguably sowed future divisions between the allies, and the siphoning of white workers from the Democratic Party.<sup>153</sup> More vigorous attempts to address union discrimination in the heyday of the alliance might have prevented this, but they may have also alienated white workers and stifled the coalition at its inception. As Zieger has written, the CIO did not "divert or defang" left-wing workers, and there is "little evidence that industrial workers had much stomach for the kinds of root-and-branch confrontation with the American state that a more radical program would have required."<sup>154</sup> The alliance of labor and civil rights of the 1940s and 1950s, though containing the seeds of its own fracture, still accomplished life-changing reforms for African Americans. Before long, the cause of civil rights and labor unions would become "braided," as Farhang and Katznelson describe it, in the eyes of many.<sup>155</sup>

### TRANSFORMING THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY

In the 1940s, the CIO and the NAACP self-consciously set out to realign the Democratic Party as the party of economic progressivism, labor rights, and civil rights. They sought to purge party elements that would block the representation of blacks and labor in the party. Future NAACP Executive Secretary Roy Wilkins wrote in 1946 that "It is the Democratic party whose basic philosophy fits the plight of the Negro both as a minority group and an economic group. The trouble with the Democrats . . . is that the carrying out of the basic philosophy is ham-strung by the

152. See, for example, Remarks of Thurgood Marshall Before CIO Convention, Atlantic City, NJ, December 3, 1952, NAACP II-A347.

153. Frymer, *Black and Blue*.

154. Zieger, *The CIO*, 374.

155. Farhang and Katznelson, "The Southern Imposition."

southern wing."<sup>156</sup> By the 1948 Democratic Convention, the national leadership of the CIO made their intentions public. After a strong civil rights plank was adopted at this convention, CIO political action committee (PAC) director Jack Kroll told a group of workers that the Democratic platform

will go a long way to separate the sheep from the goats . . . I think that the basis may have been laid for transforming the Democratic party as a whole into a genuine instrument for expressing the will of the vast majority of the people, unencumbered by civil war hangovers, unburdened by the magnolia and mint julep mentality, unhampered by sectional prejudices.<sup>157</sup>

Echoing these sentiments, the CIO-PAC's field director told CARD to "read the Dixiecrats out of the party, they have shown their hands. Then we'd be in a better position to run liberal Democrats to oust these cases."<sup>158</sup> UAW President Walter Reuther wrote to White that the 1949 filibuster of a civil rights bill was an "unholy alliance between the Dixiecrats and reactionary Northern Republicans" that "underscores the need to bring about fundamental political realignments in American politics."<sup>159</sup>

CIO-NAACP cooperation went a long way in effecting the party transformation desired. Both parties continued to equivocate on civil rights after the Great Migration. First, let us consider the Republicans. Republicans offered more consistent civil rights promises than Democrats in their platform, but never managed to enact them, even in the post-World War II Congress that they controlled. Senator Robert A. Taft, "Mr. Republican," seemed to have written off the African American vote:

The Negro situation . . . is a very difficult one. I doubt if we can outbid Mrs. Roosevelt . . . Just at present the Negroes will be satisfied with nothing except the FEPC Bill. That is something which violates any possible party philosophy we could adopt.<sup>160</sup>

156. Roy Wilkins to C.A. Franklin, November 5, 1946, Wilkins Papers, Box 47.

157. Jack Kroll Speech to Convention of United Gas, Coke, and Chemical Workers at Milwaukee, July 22, 1948, Jack Kroll Papers, Box 4, January-July, page 3. Also see Lucy Mason to P. Murray, October 30, 1944, *Operation Dixie* mf 63.

158. Committee to Abolish Discrimination Meeting Transcript, April 4, 1949, CIO Office of the Secretary Treasurer Papers 191, CIO Committee on Civil Rights Folder.

159. Walter Reuther to Walter White, March 30, 1949, NAACP VIII 83.

160. Clarence Wunderlin, ed., *The Papers of Robert A. Taft 1949-1953* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2006), 46-47. This did not mean pursuing a southern strategy, as future Republicans would. As difficult as it was to win African American Republican votes, it was even more difficult to win southern votes. Taft wrote

Whatever lingering relationship remained between African Americans and the Republican Party was strained when the CIO and the NAACP focused on passing the FEPC over other goals.<sup>161</sup> The FEPC became a viable political issue when the MOWM and NAACP forced President Roosevelt to sign an executive order for a wartime FEPC. Republicans found the FEPC to be the most unpalatable civil rights proposal on the NAACP's agenda.<sup>162</sup> The FEPC resembled the Securities and Exchange Commission and National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), in which a panel of government experts regulated private businesses.<sup>163</sup> It was designed by progressives such as CIO-PAC founder Sidney Hillman and New York City Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, and it even borrowed personnel from the NLRB.<sup>164</sup> One could have hardly invented a better institution for pitting the interests of business groups against the interests of civil rights groups. Republicans were as eager as ever to win black votes, but at this point, the most important item on the civil rights agenda produced great friction with business groups.

Democratic Party leaders in the early to mid 1940s also vacillated on civil rights despite being cognizant of the growing African American vote. An unsigned Roosevelt administration memo from 1940 claimed that blacks constituted 4–16 percent of the vote in thirteen swing states, so their vote was considered in the selection of the vice president in 1944.<sup>165</sup> Party insiders knew of Roosevelt's deteriorating health and selected a vice-presidential nomination after extensive discussion. The existing vice president, Henry Wallace, was widely popular with African Americans and unions, but his views were considered

too radical to be president. Roosevelt and several party bosses worried that one of the top candidates to replace Henry Wallace, James Byrnes, would lose several swing states by alienating African Americans. After a series of mixed signals, Byrnes was nonetheless given a "green light" on the eve of the convention. The only black representative in Congress, William L. Dawson, said that he did not think blacks would leave the party over a Byrnes nomination. Roosevelt asked Byrnes to "clear" his candidacy with Phil Murray and Sidney Hillman. Both offered strenuous objections. The president and several party bosses decided to oppose Byrnes, emphasizing labor's opposition as the foremost reason.<sup>166</sup> Despite the increasing importance of black voters, the Democratic Party might have nominated a conservative Southerner except that organized labor had a proverbial seat at the table.

Democrats wrestled with whether to match the Republican plank on civil rights and risk alienating the South in 1944. Southern Democrats, animated by the Supreme Court's decision to invalidate white primaries, had discussed bolting the convention as early as 1944. Due to their influence, the 1944 platform included only a vague statement that some rights are guaranteed by the Constitution to all citizens. Roosevelt told Dawson that he would run on his record rather than on specific civil rights pledges, and persuaded him to rally liberals around the vague plank for party unity. Although Dawson had previously urged the removal of conservative Southerners from the party, party pressure channeled his reconstructive sympathies into maintaining the existing balance between North and South.<sup>167</sup> The party replaced a civil rights crusader with a border-state politician as vice president, and caved in to southern pressure in the 1944 platform.

The relatively even balance of northern and southern influence reflected in the 1944 ticket was later upset largely by the intervention of labor, civil rights, and liberal groups. At one point in Truman's presidency, it seemed as if the party recognized the

---

in a letter that "we have a much better chance of getting the negro vote in the North." Furthermore, he saw no political or moral basis for abandoning civil rights (Wunderlin, *The Papers of Robert A. Taft*, 46–47, 135, 231, 235). Still, Taft did not support an FEPC that was empowered to attack job discrimination against blacks, arguing that it violated the party's commitment to a limited federal government. The furthest Taft would go was to support an FEPC that would investigate and publicize cases of discrimination.

161. Only Congress could pass a national FEPC, but the NAACP had some success opposing the poll tax at the state level, and lynching was becoming less common (Watson, *Lion in the Lobby*, 165–66).

162. White opposed a public announcement of this priority in 1948 (Walter White to Richard Allan, February 27, 1948, NAACP mf 13 r 13). On the change in priorities, see CARD Minutes, January 14, 1950, CIO Office of the Secretary Treasurer Papers 193, Civil Rights Meeting Folder. The NAACP and other civil rights groups convinced Truman's advisers to focus on the FEPC and drop other matters in 1950. On the NAACP's opposition to national action on the poll tax, see Conference of Negro Organization Minutes, September 4, 1953, NAACP II-A-452, page 2.

163. Anthony Chen, *The Fifth Freedom: Jobs, Politics, and Civil Rights in the United States, 1941–1972* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 46.

164. Watson, *Lion in the Lobby*, 137.

165. McMahon, *Reconsidering Roosevelt on Race*, 101.

166. Robert Ferrell, *Choosing Truman: The Democratic Convention of 1944* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press), 39–47. While it is possible that Roosevelt hoped to avoid unpleasant conversation by passing the responsibility to Hillman, contemporaneous written sources offer no support for this theory (although some of the participants explained the outcome this way afterward). The CIO was not present at the meeting where Truman was chosen, but Roosevelt did request that the suggestion be "cleared" with Hillman. Hillman had been working privately for months to find a Democratic vice-presidential candidate acceptable to all party factions, given that Wallace would not satisfy the South, and segregationist Byrnes would not satisfy the North (Foster, *The Union Politic*, 46–49; Fraser, *Labor Will Rule*, 530–31).

167. Christopher Manning, *William L. Dawson and the Limits of Black Electoral Leadership* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009), 97. However, Dawson did oppose the nomination of James Byrnes as a vice president, and supported the controversial Henry Wallace.

need to prioritize African American votes over southern votes due to electoral calculations alone. On February 2, 1948, President Truman became the first Democratic president to issue a highly publicized statement in favor of civil rights. Special Counsel Clark Clifford had presented him with a report that southern Democrats would still vote Democratic even with a civil rights platform, but African Americans might vote Republican without one. Clifford therefore submitted to Truman an ambitious set of civil rights proposals.

Truman took some steps to implement Clifford's advice, but backpedaled under pressure from southern Democrats. In the February speech, he had promised he would issue orders to end discrimination in the federal government and the armed forces. In May, he denied ever supporting the desegregation of federal employees, drawing a distinction between discrimination and segregation.<sup>168</sup> According to Phileo Nash, special assistant to the president on minority problems, "the reaction in Congress to the February 2<sup>nd</sup> message was such that there was some question in everybody's mind as to whether the President would get the nomination if he didn't back off a little bit."<sup>169</sup> The reaction had gone well beyond Congress, as the South witnessed several incidents of racial violence. A Southern Governor's Conference warned "The President must cease attacks on white supremacy or face full-fledged revolt in the South," and each of Alabama's electors pledged to vote for a Democrat other than Truman. In South Carolina, half of one county's 4,000 white voters turned out for a rally and supported secession from the party in an overwhelming voice vote.<sup>170</sup>

Pressure groups would not let Truman retreat. Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) had been plotting for months before the 1948 convention to ensure the continuation of the New Deal and Fair Deal by fighting for a strong Democratic nominee and a liberal plank. Even if Truman were to win the nomination and lose the general election, as most observers expected, the plank would help elect Democrats to Congress and establish the Democratic Party as the liberal party.<sup>171</sup> Director James Loeb told Franklin Roosevelt, Jr., that without a strong civil

rights plank, "we face, not only a defeat, but a rout of such proportions as to mean the disintegration of the liberal-labor-Democratic-Party coalition which represented the support for the New Deal under your father's leadership."<sup>172</sup> CIO President Phil Murray added, "If the party is defeated," then "opportunity may be provided for sound reconstruction upon liberal lines."<sup>173</sup> Decades later, race would become a wedge issue for unions and civil rights groups.<sup>174</sup> But in 1948, Loeb perceived civil rights as the issue that would unite liberals, laborers, and blacks, and motivate their participation.<sup>175</sup> The efforts of union leaders and civil rights groups to improve race relations at the workplace and cooperate politically seemed to defuse the potentially divisive impact of the issue.

ADA privately instructed Minneapolis mayor Hubert Humphrey to sign a statement in favor of civil rights and asked a wide variety of Democratic politicians, including New York Boss Ed Flynn, to sign it. It distributed this document to local chapters to obtain signatures from important figures in other states, so that its representatives could claim a mandate for the outlined civil rights policy at the convention.<sup>176</sup> It also urged local members to run as delegates for their precinct in order to constitute a formidable force on the convention floor. Ultimately, ADA delegates constituted 200 of the 1,200 delegates present.<sup>177</sup>

At the 1948 convention, Truman told his supporters to present a platitudinous civil rights plank, similar to that of 1944. No one on the platform committee was a civil rights crusader, and members wrote the platform quietly during the week before the convention.<sup>178</sup> The platform committee adopted it against the objections of Humphrey and conservative Southerners, both of whom promised a fight on the convention floor. CIO Secretary Treasurer James Carey crafted a minority plank with stronger, more specific pledges to support civil rights. These pledges—including the FEPC—were opposed by a majority of the public, and even a plurality of Northerners.<sup>179</sup> Truman's operatives asked Carey if the CIO "intended to give a fight on the civil rights

172. James Loeb to Franklin Roosevelt, Jr., April 27, 1948, ADA mf 31.

173. Meeting of October 29, 1943, *Minutes of the Executive Board* mf 11.

174. Frymer, *Black and Blue*.

175. Cf. Korstad and Lichtenstein, "Opportunities Lost and Found," 806.

176. James Loeb to Frank McCulloch, April 24, 1948; ADA mf 31.

177. Cohen, Karol, Noel, and Zaller, *The Party Decides*, 121.

178. Timothy N. Thurber, *The Politics of Equality: Hubert H. Humphrey and the African American Freedom Struggle* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 57.

179. Howard Schuman, Charlotte Steeh, Lawrence Bobo, and Maria Krysan, *Racial Attitudes in America: Trends and Interpretations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

168. Donaldson, *Dewey Defeats Truman*, 121, 161.

169. Interview of Phileo Nash by Jerry Hess, October 18, 1966, Truman Library.

170. William Leuchtenberg, *The White House Looks South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 2005), 182, 185, 190.

171. A number of governors and MCs feared they would lose if Truman were renominated (Donaldson, *Truman Defeats Dewey*, 136). Nash stated "Now, some of the President's advisers, I'm sure, thought it was time to ease off. I don't think that they were wrong, in general, they were just wrong, when reference to a convention where some people undoubtedly had concluded that Mr. Truman was going down to defeat anyhow and, therefore, they might as well take care of themselves" (Interview of Phileo Nash by Jerry Hess, October 18, 1966, Truman Library).



issue.” Carey “told him that there was another substantial group that would join us in that fight—ADA, and other groups.”<sup>180</sup> CIO-PAC Director Jack Kroll pushed the late-night ADA meeting that led ADA to fight for the minority plank on the convention floor.<sup>181</sup>

Truman’s convention managers lobbied against the minority plank late into the night. Truman himself called it a “crackpot amendment” in his diary and wrote that the “crackpots hope the South will bolt,” which turned out to be correct.<sup>182</sup> Congressional leaders and both former and then-current party chairmen opposed what Special Counsel Clark Clifford now called an “extreme” platform that would alienate the South.<sup>183</sup> Humphrey was worried that the plank would hurt his Senate campaign and the party, but ADA lobbyist Joseph Rauh convinced him that he was popular only because he was an outspoken advocate of liberal causes.<sup>184</sup> Humphrey remained uncommitted until 5:00 a.m. on July 14, when ADA inserted a statement in the minority plank praising Truman’s record on civil rights. That day, Humphrey delivered an inspiring speech in favor of the minority plank. After hearing the speech, New York Democratic Party boss Ed Flynn told him, “Look, you kids are right. What you’re trying to do is the only way we can wake up this country. We’ve got to stir up the interest of the minority groups in this election; otherwise we’re dead.” One of the politicians from the Bronx serving Flynn’s machine had recently been defeated by a Wallace supporter. When Flynn inquired whether other party bosses were behind

the plank, they assured him of their support.<sup>185</sup> The convention passed the minority plank over the platform committee’s plank with the support of ADA activists, party bosses, and even the author of the original plank.

The platform represented a branching point for Truman’s support for civil rights. Truman’s executive order to desegregate the armed forces on July 27, 1948, was an important milestone for civil rights. Unlike the nonbinding February 2 speech or the Democratic National Convention civil rights platform, it directly affected employment for many African Americans. When Truman passed the selective service act on June 24 without an antisegregation amendment, civil rights groups threatened marches in several black communities and at the Democratic Convention. Shortly after the Democratic Convention and the arrest of thirty draft protestors, Truman issued an order to desegregate the armed forces on July 27.<sup>186</sup> In addition to fearing the bad publicity that might come with protests, it seems likely that Truman no longer saw a point in a soft approach to civil rights.<sup>187</sup> Group pressure first initiated a platform that alienated Southerners. The incumbent president was forced to live with the platform. Groups then presented the president with the choice of alienating African Americans in addition to Southerners if he did not desegregate the armed forces.

Truman shifted his political decisions with the moving parts of the Democratic Party despite his legendary decisiveness. First, he focused on the need for black support, especially in the wake of Wallace’s challenge. After a severe reaction from the South, Truman decided he needed to win the South after all, and layered their antithetical agenda on top of his original agenda. Finally, facing pressure from the CIO and ADA, he changed back. The growth of African American voters in important states does not explain the outcome.

The CIO and ADA-initiated civil rights plank of 1948 also set a precedent for future nominating contests. Past Republican platforms had made promises

180. CARD Minutes, November 19, 1948, CIO Office of the Secretary Treasurer Papers 193, Civil Rights Committee Folder. Although Carey claimed that the presidents supported him throughout his efforts, historical accounts since then do not support this claim.

181. Speech by Jack Kroll to Convention of United Gas, Coke, and Chemical Workers at Milwaukee, July 22, 1948, Jack Kroll Papers, Box 4, January-July. President Truman later thanked the CIO for its maneuvering (CARD Minutes, November 19, 1948, CIO Office of the Secretary Treasurer Papers 193, Civil Rights Committee Folder).

182. Leuchtenberg, *The White House Looks South*, 194. After the bolt occurred in spite of Truman’s efforts, there is some evidence that Truman was thankful for ADA. He told Eleanor Roosevelt that the southern tail will no longer be “wagging the dog” (Harry Truman to Eleanor Roosevelt, December 13, 1948, Truman PPF 242, Truman Library; Harry Truman to Eleanor Roosevelt, February 11, 1950, Truman PPF 242, Truman Library).

183. Interview with Clark Clifford by Jerry Hess, July 26, 1971, Truman Library; and interview with John Barriere by Jerry Hess, December 20, 1966, Truman Library. Clifford said he had underestimated the response of the South and changed his view of the platform in light of its response. Among those lobbying for the milder plank were past DNC Chair James Farley, then-current DNC Chair Howard McGrath, future Senate Leader Scott Lucas, future Senate Whip Francis Myers, MC Bill Dawson, and Clifford.

184. Zachary Karabell, *The Last Campaign: How Harry Truman Won the 1948 Election* (New York: Random House, 2001), 157.

185. Carl Solberg, *Hubert Humphrey: A Biography* (New York: Norton and Company, 1984), 17.

186. Scott James, “A Theory of Presidential Commitment and Opportunism: Swing States, Pivotal Groups and Civil Rights under Truman and Clinton,” presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association (1997).

187. DNC research assistant John Barriere remembered that after the civil rights plank passed, “you had no choice but to pursue a strong civil rights position and hope that this would enable you to bring out a big minority vote in the key urban industrial states and enable you to carry them; and that there was no point at that junction of trying to placate the South, that is, for better or worse you had taken the fork to try to get the Negro vote and that you just had to take your chances with the Southerners, you couldn’t double track at that point. It seems to me, that once that amendment had been adopted the issue [w]as settled” (interview with John Barriere by Jerry Hess, December 20, 1966, Truman Library).

similar to the 1948 Democratic platform, but the Democratic Party had traditionally been the party of Jim Crow and states' rights. The platform provoked a historic walkout of many southern delegations, some of whom never fully returned.<sup>188</sup> ADA Director James Loeb declared that "the strangle hold of the South on the Democratic Party has finally been broken" and told a donor that he was proud that ADA divided the party and provoked the southern states to leave.<sup>189</sup> Truman won the election even though several southern states voted for a splinter faction. It was no longer speculation in a memo—the Democrats could win with a civil rights platform. African Americans had played no small part in winning states such as Illinois and Ohio, and the CIO-PAC had helped maximize voter turnout.<sup>190</sup> Party leaders needed to recognize these realities, which they might have otherwise never known about, in future elections.

The civil rights platforms served ADA's organizational interests as well as its policy ambitions. Loeb later recalled that the Truman plank was a "horrible compromise" that "didn't go whole hog." "Frankly," he told an interviewer, ADA was "looking for a fight."<sup>191</sup> At a National Board meeting in April, ADA voted to support Eisenhower's nomination.<sup>192</sup>

188. Several prominent Southerners, including Virginia's Harry Byrd and South Carolina's James Byrnes, continued to oppose national party nominees in future elections.

189. James Loeb to David Engvall, undated 1948, ADA mf 31; James Loeb to Babbette Deutsch, July 28, 1948, ADA mf 17.

190. Paul Christopher to Jack Kroll, January 20, 1948, *Operation Dixie* mf 67. The CIO-PAC hired full-time PAC organizers—often black—to recruit black voters. One such organizer, Henry White, reported that many blacks were paying their poll taxes for the first time (Executive Committee of the Tennessee State CIO PAC, Minutes of the Meeting, March 20, 1948, *Operation Dixie* mf 67). A CIO strategy note declared that if you recruit blacks popular with their peers to a citizen's committee, you would have twelve black volunteers within a half hour on the telephone. If these volunteers canvassed the black wards in traditionally Republican cities, they could change some election outcomes (Philip Murray Box 132 Folder 5, Folder 4).

191. Interview with James Loeb by Jerry Hess, June 26, 1970, Truman Library; James Loeb to Alfred Baker Lewis, July 28 1948, ADA mf 17.

192. ADA's willingness to support a candidate who could win (without a full knowledge of his political views) shows that ADA members were concerned with both practical electoral considerations and the desire to transform the party. It might be viewed as willing to prioritize the election of Democratic officeholders ahead of the civil rights issue. At the time, however, there was little reason to think that Eisenhower's views were any more conservative than Truman's. Loeb reports that Hillman was the first liberal leader to become enamored with Eisenhower. He met with Eisenhower in Germany and was impressed enough to invite him to speak at the CIO convention. At the convention, Eisenhower gave a pro-labor speech and Murray was also impressed. Although Eisenhower later denied being interested in the White House, he met with other liberal activists around the country leading up to the 1948 convention, some more skeptical than others (Interview of James Loeb with Jerry Hess, June 26, 1970, Truman Library). Loeb wrote that "We recognized all along that General Eisenhower was something of a chance. However, everyone who knows him was

A poll of forty-seven chapters showed that sixteen favored William Douglas, fourteen favored Dwight Eisenhower, and only two supported Truman.<sup>193</sup> Many members were greatly disappointed that neither Eisenhower nor Douglas was nominated by the party, and some asked for a refund of their membership fees. The plank enabled Loeb to tell members that ADA attained the most liberal platform in the country's history, which transcended any candidate's nomination.<sup>194</sup> The *New York Times*, *Time*, and *Newsweek* also reported that the platform allowed ADA to leave the convention with an enhanced reputation.<sup>195</sup>

Compared with ADA and the CIO-PAC, the NAACP played a small role in the day-to-day events of the 1948 convention. But clearly, this takes a narrow view of the NAACP's impact on politics that year. The FEPC, which had done the most to infuriate Southerners and conservatives, was made possible by the wartime order pushed by the MOWM and NAACP, and the NAACP's steady insistence on an FEPC with enforcement powers. CIO-PAC Director Jack Kroll acknowledged that the surge in black voter participation was necessary for the political realignment sought. The NAACP's legal victory invalidating white primaries made their voter mobilization possible.<sup>196</sup> And if the NAACP had clashed with labor organizations in the 1940s, civil rights would have become a wedge issue. Labor unions would not have pushed hard for a civil rights platform if the NAACP had supported the open shop or challenged unions with the Taft-Hartley Act.

In subsequent conventions, leaders of the liberal-labor alliance would view any retreat from the platform as a step backward. Democratic politicians, hoping to avoid another floor fight, were sensitive to their concerns. Many forces were necessary to assure the final outcome of the 1948 convention. Henry Wallace's third-party challenge enabled the

completely convinced of his essentially democratic viewpoint, his humility, and his ability" (James Loeb to Joseph Sharts, July 27, 1948, ADA mf 17). Additionally, ADA declared that Eisenhower would lift the Democratic fortunes only in combination with a liberal platform ("Statement on Political Policy," April 11, 1948, ADA mf 17. The statement read "As a nominee on a liberal platform, General Eisenhower would insure the election of a progressive Congress."). Only Lester Granger registered a dissent against Eisenhower and dropped his membership (Interview of James Loeb with Jerry Hess, June 26, 1970, Truman Library). Loeb reports that most members of ADA were thoroughly disillusioned with Eisenhower by 1952 and embarrassed at having supported him in 1948.

193. Steven Gillon, *Politics and Vision: ADA and American Liberalism, 1947–1985*: (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 45.

194. James Loeb to Alfred Baker Lewis, July 28, 1948, ADA mf 17.

195. There are numerous letters making this point, including some form letters, between the convention and the general election (ADA mf 17).

196. Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice*, 328.

CIO and ADA to work together. Party bosses would not have accepted the minority plank if they did not fear black defections to Wallace. The CIO-NAACP alliance is the most interesting cause, however. Vote-maximizing politicians should have acted on demographic considerations alone, without being coaxed by external groups. The carefully cultivated relationship between the NAACP and the CIO enabled civil rights to be the focal point of liberals at the 1948 convention.

### MAINTAINING THE DEMOCRATIC TRAJECTORY IN CIVIL RIGHTS

Civil rights became a permanent fixture in Democratic Party platforms, just as African Americans were becoming a reliable voting bloc rather than a swing-voting bloc (see Figure 1). Future platforms were at least as liberal on civil rights as the 1948 platform. Never again would the party slouch into the bland promises of the 1944 platform. Future Democratic nominees also avoided antagonizing the groups that had forced a floor fight in 1948, even if it meant forsaking southern allies. Estes Kefauver, John F. Kennedy, and Lyndon Johnson changed substantially on civil rights in anticipation of presidential campaigns. In some cases, they were concerned about the general election, but in most cases, they worried about the influence groups wielded at conventions and occasionally, primaries. Sometimes, there are clear records of liberal groups rallying delegates at the convention behind one of the candidates or against another. At other times, the influence of the alliance was hard to pinpoint, as its members adopted a posture of nonpartisanship. Groups did not need to make explicit threats; candidates knew that they could disrupt a convention. Candidates and their running mates rose to meet their standards, anticipating the problems they might have without a marketable reputation on civil rights.

After 1948, only one Democratic contestant, Georgia Senator Richard Russell, ran as a southern conservative. In 1952, he did not expect to win, but hoped to gather a block of southern delegates and influence the convention. His racial conservatism allowed him to prevail over Kefauver, another Southerner, in the Florida primary. But Russell was unable to obtain support from any region outside the South, despite a trip to the Midwest. Not only did he fail to earn a space on the Democratic ticket, but he wielded no influence at the convention.<sup>197</sup> He warned his protégé, Lyndon Johnson, “don’t ever

let yourself become a sectional candidate for the presidency. That was what happened to me.”<sup>198</sup>

The 1952 Democratic nominee, Adlai Stevenson, was an improvement over Truman in civil rights. Although Stevenson garnered more southern support than Truman, he had supported the ADA plank in 1948 and consistently favored the FEPC as governor of Illinois. He was supported as the liberal standard-bearer by notable civil rights supporters such as Eleanor Roosevelt, Agnes Meyer, Alfred Baker Lewis, and (privately) Roy Wilkins, who believed he was the only liberal who could retain southern support.<sup>199</sup> Conveying the concerns of other liberals, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., pleaded with Stevenson to run even before Truman dropped out. Schlesinger told him that Truman could not win, but “any retreat from the President’s platform to appease the southerners would be even more fatal. You appear the only solution.”<sup>200</sup> By February 1952, Stevenson won the plurality of support among ADA board members even though many were personal friends of Kefauver. In their view, Kefauver was “doomed first by his bad civil rights record.”<sup>201</sup> Stevenson’s correspondence with liberal leaders was far more intimate and detailed than his correspondence with southern supporters such as Senators Richard Russell (GA) and William Fulbright (AK), and the governors of South Carolina and Mississippi. I found little evidence that civil rights opponents were corresponding with Stevenson to influence the Democratic campaign or the convention. Both ADA and the CIO-PAC were. Stevenson had no written contact with the racially conservative Southern States Industrial Council, the seventh-largest lobby in Washington, D.C.<sup>202</sup> Some former Dixiecrats

198. Robert A. Caro, *Master of the Senate* (New York: Knopf, 2002), 822.

199. Not all liberals agreed on Stevenson. Among ADA liberals, Walter Reuther, Joseph Rauh, and Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr., preferred New York Governor William Averell Harriman. Hubert Humphrey and UAW lobbyist Donald Montgomery thought only Stevenson could beat Eisenhower, and that supporting Stevenson was the best way to influence him (Gillon, *Politics and Vision*, 82–88).

200. Arthur Schlesinger to Adlai Stevenson, March 25, 1952, Box 73, Adlai Stevenson Papers (Princeton, NJ: Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library), hereafter Stevenson Papers.

201. ADA may have chosen Stevenson anyway, but it is clear they would not support a candidate opposed to civil rights. Violet Gunther to Robert Trentlyon, February 18, 1952, ADA mf 21. Its annual convention in May did not endorse a candidate because loyalty was split between Stevenson, Kefauver, and Harriman (Reginald Zalles to Robert Thomas, October 22, 1952, ADA mf 21).

202. I searched through Stevenson’s records for the Council as well as its president, R. Kirby Longino. After the 1948 election, Longino argued against working with either political party and focusing on issues. Vice presidential nominee John Sparkman, from Alabama, clashed with the Southern State Industrial Council throughout the decade. The Council despised the 1956 vice-presidential nominee, Estes Kefauver. See Katherine Rye Jewell, “As Dead as Dixie: The Southern States Industrial Council and the End of the New South, 1933–1954” (PhD diss., Boston

197. Robert Mann, *The Walls of Jericho: Lyndon Johnson, Hubert Humphrey, Richard Russell, and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1996), 122–27.



supported Eisenhower over Stevenson; in South Carolina, delegates gathered 53,000 signatures to place Eisenhower on the ballot as an independent candidate, allowing conservative Democrats to vote against Stevenson without voting Republican.<sup>203</sup> Other Southerners simply viewed Stevenson as less objectionable than his rivals for nomination.

Several Democratic Party leaders met before the 1952 convention to craft a platform substantively committed to civil rights, but without language that would alienate the South.<sup>204</sup> Interestingly, they avoided conflict by providing the liberal groups most of what they wanted. The 1952 platform retained the 1948 platform's support for antidiscrimination laws, but added opposition to obstructionist Senate tactics, and federal legal support for victims of civil rights violations.<sup>205</sup> Reuther still attempted to organize a floor fight in favor of an even more ambitious platform, but most liberals held back. The NAACP considered the 1952 Democratic platform an improvement over the 1948 platform. Byrnes said that the platform was worse than the 1948 platform because it supported federal lawsuits on behalf of citizens claiming that their civil rights had been violated.<sup>206</sup>

ADA members even passed a resolution at the convention that no delegate would be seated unless he signed a "loyalty oath" to place the national ticket on the state ballot, although this resolution was not enforced across the board.<sup>207</sup> The most important concession to the South in 1952 was the nomination of Alabama Senator John Sparkman for vice president.<sup>208</sup> Although Sparkman was consistently liberal on economic and labor issues, he opposed civil rights measures up to and including the Civil Rights Act of 1964. ADA condemned his stance on civil rights but said that he was better than any other potential running mate from the South.<sup>209</sup> Some, including Humphrey and Schlesinger, believed

Sparkman was the best hope for a "New South," since he had helped design and pass the 1952 civil rights plank. His economic liberalism and his willingness to meet with liberals to discuss civil rights suggested that he might be persuaded to support civil rights down the line, and he would be in a better position to rally southern MCs than they would. Humphrey said "it's important that the voice of liberalism in the South be given a chance to be heard."<sup>210</sup> Sparkman was no Hubert Humphrey, but he was no James Byrnes, either.

In the contest for the Democratic nomination in 1956, no major candidate ran to Stevenson's right on racial issues. During the primaries, New York Governor William Averell Harriman vied for the liberal vote by opposing any federal aid to education that did not require schools to be desegregated.<sup>211</sup> Kefauver also attempted to remove liberal doubts by flanking Stevenson's left on civil rights, even though he had opposed the FEPC through the 1952 campaign.<sup>212</sup> Primaries took on a new level of importance when Kefauver defeated Stevenson in Minnesota's open primary.<sup>213</sup> South Carolina State Senator Edgar Brown warned Stevenson that "we can hold every Southern state in line this time" but "it won't do to lose" the California primary, where civil rights was an important issue.<sup>214</sup> The NAACP's West Coast representative told Stevenson that Kefauver would win unless he matched Harriman and Kefauver's position on civil rights. Stevenson's campaign aides believed the NAACP held considerable sway over white liberals in California.<sup>215</sup> Well ahead of the primaries, Stevenson had laid the groundwork to win over black voters. He tapped former NUL Treasurer Lloyd Garrison (the great-grandson of the abolitionist) to meet with NUL and obtain a list of important blacks to meet in the summer of 1955.<sup>216</sup> As the

University, 2010), 332, 357. There are also only four pieces of correspondence between John F. Kennedy and the Council at the John F. Kennedy Library (Boston, MA), hereafter JFK Library.

203. Jason Morgan Ward, *Defending White Democracy: The Making of a Segregationist Movement and the Remaking of Racial Politics, 1936–1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 96, 155–56.

204. Thurber, *The Politics of Equality*, 182–83.

205. James Byrnes to South Carolina State Democratic Convention, Stevenson Papers Box 16; "Comparison of Two Platforms on Civil Rights," August 21, 1952, NAACP IX:71.

206. Walter White, July 24 1952, NAACP II A452; James Byrnes to South Carolina State Democratic Convention, Stevenson Papers Box 16.

207. Abraham Holtzman, "Party Responsibility and Loyalty," *Journal of Politics* 22 (1960): 487.

208. Interview with Oscar Chapman by Jerry Hess, May 19, 1972, Truman Library.

209. Reginald Zalles to Helen Rotch, August 12, 1952, ADA mf 21. Georgia Senator Richard Russell was under consideration, and was conservative on more issues than Sparkman (Francis Biddle to Herbert Leman, July 4, 1952, ADA mf 21).

210. Thurber, *The Politics of Equality*, 84.

211. Stevenson received a memo on an alleged strategy by Harriman to line up endorsements by prominent African Americans and have Tammany boss Carmine DeSapio introduce him as a champion of civil rights on the first ballot. From there, he planned to gather momentum among liberals (Harry Harris to Edward Greenfield and Co., March 6, 1956, Stevenson Papers, Box 268).

212. He tried to drive a wedge between Stevenson and his liberal supporters by pointing out Stevenson's support among southern conservatives, even though Stevenson's positions were hard to distinguish from his own. His efforts were for naught; liberals at ADA and the AFL-CIO greatly respected Kefauver but supported Stevenson. Joseph Gorman, *Estes Kefauver: A Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 234–43.

213. Stephen Mitchell to Adlai Stevenson, March 20, 1956, Stevenson Papers, Box 58.

214. Edgar Brown to Adlai Stevenson, February 11, 1956, and June 6, 1956, both in Stevenson Papers, Box 14.

215. Harry Ashmore, *Civil Rights and Wrongs: A Memoir of Race and Politics 1944–1994* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994), 118–20.

216. Lloyd Garrison to Arthur Schlesinger, August 12, 1955, Stevenson Papers, Box 73; Memorandum for Archibald Alexander from LK Garrison, May 2, 1956, Stevenson Papers, Box 354.

California primary loomed, Stevenson called for more executive leadership in desegregation and strengthened his critique of Eisenhower. With the support of Loren Miller, who owned three weekly black newspapers in Los Angeles, Stevenson won in most of the black districts in California by a two-to-one margin.<sup>217</sup> With the victory in California, Stevenson wrapped up the nomination.

The 1956 platform promised more than the 1952 platform, but it disappointed civil rights groups by not specifically supporting the enforcement of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Convention Chair Sam Rayburn limited the speaking time of liberal groups that opposed the 1956 plank, including the UAW, the NAACP, and ADA. The voice vote was unclear and Rayburn ignored liberal pleas for a roll-call vote.<sup>218</sup> When unions and their allies lost the platform fight, Stevenson tried to counteract the disappointment by stressing the need for enforcement in his acceptance speech. He repeated this message in Little Rock and Harlem. Southern governors protested that these speeches made it difficult to hold Democratic Party loyalists in line, but Stevenson proceeded undeterred.<sup>219</sup>

Unions and their allies also played a decisive role in choosing the vice president. Seeking southern support for a vice-presidential nomination, Senator Humphrey softened his stance on civil rights and tried to get delegates to focus on voting rights rather than desegregation. He urged Northerners to be “patient.” When Stevenson ultimately left the choice of the vice-presidential nomination to the convention, the UAW informed Humphrey that his weak stand on civil rights led the union to support Kefauver, and other industrial delegations also fell in line.<sup>220</sup> Kefauver had not only campaigned as a civil rights liberal, but investigated Tennessee’s Crump machine, which had brutally and illegally suppressed civil rights and union activity.<sup>221</sup> Even though he lost southern delegates with these positions, he made the correct strategic choice.<sup>222</sup>

217. LK Garrison to William McCormick Blair, Jr., April 30, 1956, Stevenson Papers, Box 36. Edgar Brown to Adlai Stevenson, June 6, 1956, Stevenson Papers, Box 14.

218. Boyle, *The UAW and the Heyday of American Liberalism*, 125. The NAACP even called the 1956 Republican platform “a shade” better, as it supported *Brown* and declared that racial integration “must be encouraged and the work of the courts supported in every legal manner by all branches of the Federal Government.” But the NAACP added that the Republican platform, unlike the Democratic platform, failed to address rules reform in the Senate (Roy Wilkins to branch officers, August 29, 1956, NAACP A245).

219. Hugh White to Adlai Stevenson, August 8, 1956, Stevenson Papers, Box 89; Edgar Brown to Adlai Stevenson, October 5 1956, Stevenson Papers, Box 14.

220. Boyle, *The UAW and the Heyday of American Liberalism*, 125–26; Thurber, *The Politics of Equality*, 97.

221. Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights*.

222. Gorman, *Estes Kefauver: A Biography*, 315–16. Kefauver’s liberal national campaign alienated much of his southern

As in 1956, serious contenders for the 1960 nomination recognized African American voters as an essential constituency for both the nomination and the general election, and hired staff members with extensive ties to black communities. Little Rock made school segregation a national political debate. The NAACP’s Supreme Court victory against school segregation, aided by organized labor, created an issue that forced candidates to choose between African Americans and white Southerners. Candidates continued to seek some support from the South but avoided having the South as their primary base of support. Senate Democratic leader Lyndon Johnson, learning from Russell’s campaign in 1952, became more supportive of civil rights. As the 1957 Civil Rights Act was taking shape, Johnson was bluntly advised that “if you vote against a civil rights bill, you can forget your presidential ambitions in 1960.”<sup>223</sup> Not only did he not oppose the bill, but he attempted to “transform the Eisenhower bill into the Johnson bill” and move into “the mainstream of the Democratic Party,” as two journalists described it.<sup>224</sup> Johnson persuaded some southern Democrats to vote for the Civil Rights Act of 1957 so that he could solidify his civil rights credentials and prevent Humphrey from winning the nomination in 1960. Strom Thurmond told an interviewer that Russell refrained from fighting the bill with his normal parliamentary tactics because “he was trying to help Lyndon get elected president.”<sup>225</sup> Russell later refused to campaign for Johnson in 1960, saying that “any concerted action . . . would stamp Lyndon as the Southern candidate.” It would cause Johnson “a great deal more harm than good.”<sup>226</sup>

Johnson’s willingness to ignore his Texas constituents and pass a historic civil rights bill was indicative of how far the national party had moved. Though a seasoned politician, Johnson still underestimated what it took to appease the dominant groups at the 1960 convention. Notwithstanding the Civil Rights Act of 1957, he was too conservative for the AFL-CIO and the UAW (which controlled more than one hundred delegates). A campaign adviser said that Johnson “really thought these guys were

---

support, and the Tennessee delegation barely stood behind him for the vice-presidential nomination. Outside of Tennessee, Kefauver received 39 delegates from southern states to John F. Kennedy’s 249. ADA overwhelmingly supported Kefauver over Kennedy. See Clifton Brock, *Americans for Democratic Action* (Washington, DC: Public Affairs Press, 1962), 185.

223. Leuchtenberg, *The White House Looks South*, 259–65.

224. Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, *Lyndon Johnson: the Exercise of Power*

225. John Goldsmith, *Colleagues: Richard Russell and His Apprentice Lyndon B. Johnson* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), 65.

226. Mann, *The Walls of Jericho*, 264. Russell campaigned for Johnson in the fall in Texas after Lady Bird Johnson was assaulted in a Dallas rally. The ticket won in Texas by a small margin (288).

going to come around. Hell, as long as he wasn't with them on civil rights, they were *never* going to support him!"<sup>227</sup> ADA published a pamphlet entitled *Lyndon Johnson Is Unqualified*, and sent a letter to every delegate labeling him "a conservative, anti-civil rights, gas-and-oil Senator."<sup>228</sup>

As a presidential candidate, John F. Kennedy had to shed some of the support he sought from the South as a vice-presidential candidate in 1956. Kennedy's future southern campaign manager managed to rally southern delegates to his cause in 1956, mainly because they were strongly opposed to other candidates such as Humphrey and Kefauver.<sup>229</sup> Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus said that

the Kennedys at that time were sort of known to us as middle-of-the-road people, they were not extreme liberals, nor extreme conservatives. Kefauver had quite a bit of disfavor in the state because he's from the South and many southerners felt that he had been too liberal on some of the issues which vitally affected the region . . . Many of the people in the state felt that with the Kennedy background—his father was a free enterprise businessman and a member of the Roosevelt administration—he would not be an extremist on any issue.<sup>230</sup>

Mississippi Governor James Coleman later said the senator was "sober and temperate on civil rights. He's no hell raiser or Barnburner."<sup>231</sup> Kennedy quipped after the convention that "I'll be singing 'Dixie' the rest of my life."<sup>232</sup> Kennedy associates wrote to thousands of former delegates and officeholders around the country leading up to the 1960 contest, asking about Kennedy's strength in their area. In the former Confederate states, more respondents brought up civil rights than the candidate's religion. In general, white Southerners believed that Kennedy was the most sympathetic of the candidates who could win over the liberal wing of the party, which they recognized as necessary for the nomination.<sup>233</sup> The South's most conservative senators,

227. Caro, *Master of the Senate*, 808, 817–18.

228. Leuchtenberg, *The White House Looks South*, 279.

229. Interview with John M. Bailey by Charles T. Morrissey, April 10, 1964, Oral History Program, JFK Library.

230. Interview with Orval Faubus by Larry Hackman, June 29, 1967, JFK Library Oral History Program.

231. The quote is from 1958. See Nick Bryant, *The Bystander: John F. Kennedy and the Struggle for Black Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 97.

232. David Burner and Thomas West, *The Torch Is Passed: The Kennedy Brothers and American Liberalism* (New York: Atheneum, 1984), 94.

233. Even Lyndon Johnson was suspect after playing a strong role in passing the Civil Rights Act of 1957. See Robert C. Arnold (Chairman of University of Georgia) to John Hynes, September 29, 1959, Pre-Presidential Files, Georgia: Political A-B; CW McKay, Jr. to Theodore Sorensen, March 10, 1960, Pre-Presidential Files, JFK Library; Alabama: Political McKay; Edward Reid to

including John Stennis (D-MS), James Eastland (D-MS), and Harry Byrd (D-VA), pledged to support Lyndon Johnson on the first ballot but Kennedy on subsequent ballots.<sup>234</sup>

Kennedy's support in the South caused grave concern among NAACP officeholders and delegates to their national convention.<sup>235</sup> They were also alarmed that Kennedy voted to refer the 1957 Civil Rights Act to the obstructionist Judiciary Committee and allow (white) juries to try civil rights violators, notwithstanding promises made to the NAACP's Clarence Mitchell.<sup>236</sup> During Kennedy's 1958 Senate re-election campaign, Mitchell and Wilkins emphasized his southern ties and his votes on the Civil Rights Act of 1957 to black audiences in Massachusetts. When Kennedy defended his record, Wilkins replied that black voters

know that ordinarily a Democratic candidate must not proceed so far as to destroy all his support in the Southern states; but they view with more than casual distress any events which seems to indicate close identity of the candidate with the well-known views of the Negro's traditional opponents. They swallowed Sparkman in 1952 because they had faith that Stevenson, while welcoming Deep South support, would not go along completely with Deep South sentiment on the Negro. . . . They feel uneasy over this apparent entente cordiale between Kennedy of Massachusetts and

---

H. Coleman Long, April 27, 1959, Pre-Presidential Files, Alabama: Edward Reid file; Stuart Brown to William Battle, March 21, 1960, Pre-Presidential Files, Virginia: Stuart Brown; Stuart Brown to Steven Smith, March 21, 1960, Pre-Presidential Files, Virginia: Stuart Brown, all at JFK Library. Alabama Governor John Patterson later remembered that Southerners hoped "we would have a place where we could get an audience for the problems that we had." See Sean Savage, *JFK, LBJ, and the Democratic Party* (New York: SUNY Press, 2004), 19. A former Georgia legislator wrote that "It is my opinion that you are by far the best man for the South . . . you are the only serious contender who would not have to sell the South down the river to get the support of the ultra-liberals." See Jack Helms to John Hynes, January 6, 1960, Pre-Presidential Files, Georgia Political H-J, JFK Library. One former delegate from South Carolina wrote that Kennedy "will probably not be as vicious anti-South as some members of the party, particularly the left wing group which now controls it." See John K. de Loach to John Hynes, September 14, 1959, Pre-Presidential Files, JFK Library. Also see Pre-Presidential Files, South Carolina: Political D-L; Asa Green to John Hynes, October 20, 1959, Pre-Presidential Files, Alabama: Political D-G; Judge James Hugh McFaddin to John F. Kennedy, January 30 1959, Pre-Presidential Files, South Carolina: Political M-P; CA Jacobs to John Hynes, September 10, 1959, Pre-Presidential Files, VA: J-L, all at the JFK Library.

234. Frank Barber to John Hynes, September 24, 1959, Pre-Presidential Files, Mississippi: Political A-C, JFK Library.

235. Interview with Ruth M. Batson by Sheldon Stern, January 24, 1979, JFK Library Oral History Program.

236. Kennedy promised not to support any "ruinous" amendments. In correspondence with white Southerners, he pointed out that cases would be tried before southern juries. See Bryant, *The Bystander*, 71, 77.



Griffin, Timmerman, Talmadge, Eastland, et al, of Dixie.<sup>237</sup>

The NAACP made it clear that Kennedy needed to choose either the civil rights coalition or the southern coalition in his anticipated race for the nomination.

Kennedy chose the civil rights coalition. To repair his standing with black voters, Kennedy recruited several Boston civil rights activists, who compiled a list of black community leaders throughout the nation and tried to arrange for meetings between them and the candidate.<sup>238</sup> Wilkins was apparently persuaded by Kennedy's allies in the NAACP to write a positive letter on his behalf, which was leaked to the press.<sup>239</sup> Kennedy also joined the Democratic Advisory Council, an official party apparatus designed to let liberals speak for the national party. He refused to join it when it was founded in 1957, as Southerners viewed the committee as a way to displace southern MCs as the voice of the party.<sup>240</sup> Whether NAACP opposition would have been the kiss-of-death in his upcoming presidential campaign, Kennedy treated it as if it could have been. In the fall campaign of 1960, Kennedy went to considerable lengths to avoid being photographed with southern supporters such as Faubus.<sup>241</sup> Kennedy was acting on electoral considerations, as candidate-centered theories of politics predict, but the NAACP changed those considerations by beginning to mobilize black public opinion against him. Without the interference of pressure groups, Kennedy would have leaned toward the southern side of the civil rights straddle.

As the convention approached, Kennedy seemed far more concerned with the black vote than with the southern vote. His aides said that pragmatism in civil rights would not satisfy blacks, and Southerners would support Johnson anyway. Kennedy told Schlesinger that it would be "absolutely fatal" to be

nominated largely by Southerners. "I want to be nominated by the liberals. I don't want to go screwing around with all those Southern bastards."<sup>242</sup> A prospectus on the convention ventured that Kennedy could win the nomination with no support from the ex-Confederate states. Furthermore, in an appendix on "The Relative Value of Liberal and Conservative Ties," the prospectus argued that if Stevenson sought the nomination, the two-time nominee could win the nomination if he added Humphrey's votes. Humphrey's supporters, therefore, were more essential than Johnson's.<sup>243</sup> Kennedy therefore outlined a plan to win over liberal delegates to New York's Liberal Party. Since the plan made little effort to win over Southerners, a *New York Times* headline read "Kennedy Assures Liberals He Seeks No Help in the South," largely foreclosing that option for him.<sup>244</sup>

Kennedy deflected a move by liberal delegates, including Eleanor Roosevelt, to support Stevenson by packing the platform committee with liberals.<sup>245</sup> The platform committee wrote the most ambitious civil rights plank to date, supporting *Brown* explicitly and praising the civil disobedience tactics of the growing civil rights movement.<sup>246</sup> Reuther and Meany covertly rallied support for Kennedy while publicly denying any role.<sup>247</sup> Kennedy persuaded ADA and UAW liberals that they needed to unite behind him to defeat Johnson.<sup>248</sup> Kennedy's southern supporters quietly assured southern delegates that he was a gradualist in civil rights. In

242. Bryant, *The Bystander*, 106, 132.

243. "Prospectus for 1960," undated, Sorensen Papers, Box 22, JFK Library.

244. Bryant, *The Bystander*, 135. Troutman and Kennedy agreed that their chances of regaining the South's trust were lost until the convention. Interview with Robert Troutman by David Powers, February 2, 1964, Oral History Program, JFK Library.

245. Gillon, *Politics and Vision*, 133.

246. According to Wofford, the original platform drafted was meant to be ambitious in anticipation of the compromises likely to be made. No one thought that the draft would be accepted in full. Robert F. Kennedy did not know about this strategy, nor did he read the draft carefully. He instructed the campaign to push for the Bowles platform in its entirety. Southerners did not press for a roll-call vote, although they wrote a minority platform (Mann, *The Walls of Jericho*, 273). Wilkins speculated that Johnson's vice-presidential candidacy "helped the Democrats adopt a strong civil rights plank because his followers could not afford to oppose the plank and still hope to recruit votes for Johnson outside the South" (Stern, "John F. Kennedy and Civil Rights," 810). Sorensen remembers that Robert F. Kennedy thought the platform promised "too many unwarranted hopes" and "specifics that could not be fulfilled" (Carl Brauer, *John F. Kennedy and the Second Reconstruction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 36).

247. Taylor E. Dark, *Unions and the Democrats: An Enduring Alliance* (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 2001), 78–80.

248. Stern, "John F. Kennedy and Civil Rights," 809. In the West Virginia primary, Kennedy supporters began a whispering campaign that if Humphrey obtained the nomination, Johnson would be the vice president (Interview with Marjorie Lawson by Ronald Grele, October 25, 1965, Oral History Program, JFK Library).

237. Roy Wilkins to John F. Kennedy, May 29, 1960, Sorensen Subject Files Box 9, JFK Library.

238. He hired Herbert Tucker, the president of the Boston chapter of the NAACP, and Marjorie Lawson, a prominent lawyer. (Interview with Marjorie Lawson by Ronald Grele, October 25, 1965, Oral History Program, JFK Library).

239. Bryant, *The Bystander*, 95. The letter read that "Senator Kennedy has one of the best voting records on civil rights and related issues of any Senator in Congress. It would require too much time and space to detail Senator Kennedy's record over his twelve years' service in the House and in the Senate" (Quoted in John F. Kennedy to Herbert Tucker, January 24, 1959, Sorensen Subject Files, Box 9). By the end of October, Kennedy wrote that "the NAACP-Roy Wilkins situation has come along rather well" (John F. Kennedy to Lewis Weinstein, October 30, 1958, Sorensen Subject Files, Box 9). Kennedy won 73.6 percent of the black vote in Massachusetts in November. See Mark Stern, "John F. Kennedy and Civil Rights: From Congress to the Presidency," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 19 (1989).

240. Bryant, *The Bystander*, 111.

241. Interview with Orval Faubus by Larry Hackman, June 29, 1967, Oral History Program, JFK Library.

Senator Johnson's office, Kennedy promised Georgia's governor that he would never send troops into Georgia to enforce school desegregation.<sup>249</sup> Since 1944, the tables had turned. Roosevelt appeased the Southerners while Dawson quietly reassured blacks behind closed doors; Kennedy appeased the civil rights activists while quietly reassuring Southerners behind closed doors.

Kennedy's technique for maximizing delegate votes was to publicly support civil rights as understood by pressure groups such as the NAACP and New York's Liberal Party. Martin Luther King Jr. and the SCLC, which had formed since the previous presidential election, drew even more attention than the NAACP. Several southern governors warned the campaign that if Kennedy associated too closely with King, they would support Nixon, and Kennedy would lose their states.<sup>250</sup> After King was sentenced to four months of hard labor, his wife became hysterical. Kennedy aides prevailed upon Kennedy to call Coretta Scott King and offer consolation. After news of the call became public, Robert F. Kennedy was livid, and initially declared "You bomb-throwers have lost the whole campaign." Upon learning the details of King's imprisonment, however, he called the judge and arranged for King's release.<sup>251</sup> Nixon's campaign did not intervene. The Democrats distributed two million copies of a pamphlet contrasting Nixon's and Kennedy's reactions to King's sentence, quoting Nixon with a "No Comment."

Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett and White Citizens Council activist Roy Harris attempted to rally Southerners behind unpledged electors, but most segregationists viewed the attempt as quixotic and refused to participate.<sup>252</sup> Southern conservatives seemed resigned to their status as a minority. After Kennedy's victory, southern politicians realized that Kennedy won more black votes in the South than he lost white votes, and Democrats "gained a wider margin of freedom on racial issues."<sup>253</sup>

As the civil rights movement reached its crescendo in the 1960s, politicians experienced increased pressure to fight for civil rights. Among other organizations, the SCLC, Congress of Racial Equality, and Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee generated public sympathy for the cause with civil disobedience and public demonstrations. By influencing public opinion, they contributed to the passage of landmark civil rights laws. But the CIO-NAACP alliance had realigned the party so that national

leaders were prepared to take such steps when circumstances permitted. All of the civil rights organizations mentioned helped raise African Americans out of second-class citizenship, but the NAACP was by far the most important civil rights group in the quarter-century effort to convert the Democratic Party from the nation's premier defender of southern racism into a powerful force against it.

## ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS

Democratic tickets and platforms privileged black voters over southern voters beginning in 1948. What was responsible for this liberal trajectory? A powerful alternative to the view presented above is the "responsible parties" thesis, in which politicians respond rationally to voter preferences. As voters change, politicians change with them to win elections. In one example of this view, James argues that parties tailor their policy agenda so that their presidential candidates can win pivotal states in the Electoral College.<sup>254</sup> Parties evolve not because of group pressure, but because candidates determine what issues matter to key voters. As shown above, Roosevelt, Truman, and party bosses were acutely aware of the importance of the African American vote in important states in the general election. Stevenson, Kefauver, Kennedy, and Johnson knew that losing the votes of African Americans and labor could cost them the Democratic nomination.

But calculating which voters and which states are pivotal is often a murky undertaking. At first, Truman and his key adviser Clark Clifford thought Truman could win over black voters by supporting civil rights without facing serious defections from the South. But the southern response was so severe that Truman was forced to reconsider. Truman was willing to layer new groups on top of the party, but not to displace older groups. He therefore resisted supporting a strong civil rights platform until the end of the 1948 convention, prioritizing the liberal wing only after a polarizing civil rights plank was passed against his instructions. Group pressure at the convention, rather than general election calculations, forced him to side in favor of civil rights.

Even when electoral calculations are clear, parties are not always in a position to act on them. Republicans knew that African Americans were pivotal in the Electoral College in the 1940s, but did not support any civil rights legislation in the 80<sup>th</sup> Congress. Republican leaders believed that they had no chance of winning the South, which increased pressure on them to campaign for the votes of African American groups in northern states.

249. Bryant, *The Bystander*, 181.

250. Carl Brauer, *John F. Kennedy and the Second Reconstruction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 46.

251. Mann, *The Walls of Jericho*, 284.

252. Ward, *Defending White Democracy*, 164–65.

253. Harris Wofford Memorandum to President-Elect Kennedy on Civil Rights, December 10, 1960, Box 62, Robert F. Kennedy Papers, JFK Library.

254. Scott James, *Presidents, Parties, and the State: A Party System Perspective on Democratic Regulatory Choice, 1884–1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

However, business organizations aligned with the party sharply limited their ability to do so.

Another problem for the responsible parties thesis is that ambitious presidential candidates must win their party's nomination in the primaries before they get a chance to compete in the general elections. This seemed to be Kennedy's concern when he distanced himself from southern politicians in order to attract the support of black civil rights leaders for his nomination. As argued throughout this paper, the politics of nominations are often at least as important as the politics of general elections, and the responsible parties thesis speaks mainly to the latter.

The theory of responsible parties might explain the assent of Democratic Party bosses to the 1948 civil rights plank. As actors of pure political ambition, the bosses would more likely be acting from electoral calculation rather than succumbing to group pressure or commitment to civil rights.<sup>255</sup> And a basis for calculating that a strong civil rights plank would help the Democratic Party was present in Henry Wallace's Progressive Party candidacy, which threatened to help Republicans in swing northern states by attracting African American voters from the Democratic ticket. Yet regional party bosses were surely aware of the electoral needs of the party before the convention, and offered no discernible support for a strong plank until the ADA raised it—after which they might have feared that failure to support it would anger their black constituents. Since most party bosses have not left behind written records,<sup>256</sup> their

255. On the contrary, evidence indicates that party bosses opposed civil rights away from the public eye. Bosses Jacob Arvey, Carmine DeSapio, and David Lawrence opposed efforts of an ambitious party chairman to liberalize the national party on civil rights. DNC Chair Paul Butler created the Democratic Advisory Council in 1953 to give the national party a singular voice in the absence of a Democratic president. Congressional leaders such as Rayburn and Johnson rightly viewed it as an attempt to provide a liberal alternative to more conservative congressional Democrats. In late 1958, Butler said that the South should not remain in the party just to retain chairmanships on national television. He declared that the 1960 platform would offer

no compromise on the integration problem. . . Those people in the South who are not deeply dedicated to the policies and beliefs in fact the philosophy of the Democratic Party will have to go their own way. . . [If Southerners did not] want to go along on the racial problem and the whole area of human rights, [they would] have to take political asylum wherever they can find it, either in the Republican Party or a third party.

Pennsylvania Boss David Lawrence distributed incriminating evidence against Butler to National Committee members and called for his ouster. See George Roberts, *Paul M. Butler: Hoosier Politician and National Political Leader* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987), 54, 94, 97, 160.

256. The most important party bosses were arguably New York's Ed Flynn, who pressured the Pennsylvania delegation to support the plank, and David L. Lawrence, who controlled the Pennsylvania delegation. Flynn's small collection of written

intentions and alternate plans are opaque. But their willingness to support a stronger plank without initiating one is more consistent with the idea that outside pressure groups were the driving force.

It is also notable that even after the Wallace threat disappeared, the party continued to move leftward on race. In the 1950s, the labor–civil rights alliance boldly pressed Democratic leadership to support another polarizing policy that required them to marginalize their southern wing—school desegregation. After the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the allies might have simply accepted Stevenson and Kennedy's southern overtures as they walked a geographic tightrope to the Democratic nomination, but instead they forced the candidates to eschew gradualism and embrace liberal positions on civil rights. It was no longer possible to appease racial liberals with measures that would maintain the New Deal equilibrium between North and South. African Americans, who were an important group in pivotal states, had different policy demands because of the work of groups representing them. Goals that seemed impossible decades earlier were now within reach. These demands forced Democratic Party leaders to marginalize the South more than they would have otherwise, which in turn had its electoral cost: President Johnson reportedly said that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 would sink the Party's fortunes in the South for a generation.

Furthermore, the CIO and NAACP had the challenging task of making the alliance work. Had the civil rights groups and labor groups not worked together in a constructive manner, civil rights could have been a dividing issue among liberals, rather than a uniting issue. Past and future events proved that blacks, liberals, and white union workers could work against each other in politics. The labor–civil rights coalition was most influential when it presented a united front to politicians. President Roosevelt created the unprecedented wartime FEPC only with combined pressure from the NAACP and A. Philip Randolph, a labor and civil rights leader. When the wartime FEPC expired, the CIO and NAACP agreed to support an FEPC with enforcement powers over all other civil rights goals. Based on their cue, the Democratic Party leadership promoted

---

records are held at the Franklin Roosevelt Library in Hyde Park, New York. Almost no correspondence exists between him and other party bosses, or Humphrey and Biemiller. The University of Pittsburgh and the Pennsylvania State archives contain some written records from Lawrence, but only after he became governor in 1959. Illinois Party Boss Jacob Arvey's records are kept at the Truman Library. This collection consists of only 175 documents, only two of which date to Truman's years as president. Frank Hague of New Jersey, who also agreed to the civil rights plank, did not leave any substantial written records.



it over less controversial goals such as voting rights and antilynching bills.<sup>257</sup>

In addition to the responsible parties thesis, there is another group-centered explanation for the trajectory. It is possible to see ADA, and not the CIO, as the most important group behind the 1948 civil rights plank in the Democratic Party platform. However, it is not clear that ADA would have supported civil rights had the NAACP failed to participate constructively with liberal and labor groups in the 1940s.

ADA received a significant boon, if not an essential one, from the CIO. ADA was a small, poorly funded organization before the CIO supported it. An early ADA statement of strategy declared that "While it is true that labor cannot possibly win by itself in the present political composition of America, it is even more true that no progressive program can be successful without active support of the organized workers."<sup>258</sup> ADA leaders complained that declining labor contributions in the 1950s were the most important part of its financial deficit and its declining influence.<sup>259</sup> Beyond contributions, the CIO could act as a veto player on ADA. CIO President Phil Murray refused to support the Union for Democratic Action's reorganization plan (to become ADA) in 1943 for fear of dividing anti-Communist and pro-Communist forces on the left. His opposition stopped the plan in its infancy. In 1946, the CIO was a major sponsor of the competing "Conference of Progressives" (along with the NAACP), but the CIO later forbade members from supporting either the Conference or ADA in order to avoid a split among progressives. When the third-party movement behind Wallace threatened to hurt Truman's reelection prospects in 1948, Murray finally authorized an alliance between the CIO and the anti-Wallace ADA.<sup>260</sup> The CIO-PAC then cooperated with ADA and shared political strategy and survey data.<sup>261</sup> In 1947, ADA's total revenue from labor unions was 22 percent of all donations; in 1948, the figure was 45 percent. Considerable overlap also existed between the leadership of both organizations.<sup>262</sup> Despite ADA's important role at the 1948 convention, its leaders admitted that they needed the help of organized labor more than it needed them.<sup>263</sup>

257. CARD Minutes, January 14, 1950, CIO Office of the Secretary Treasurer Papers 193, Civil Rights Meeting Folder; Robert Taft, "Statement on Failure of the Cloture Vote," May 19, 1950 in Wunderlin, *The Papers of Robert A. Taft 1949–1953*, 161.

258. "A Political Program for Liberals," November 1, 1948, ADA mf 106.

259. Brock, *Americans for Democratic Action*, 164–65.

260. Brock, *Americans for Democratic Action*, 50, 73.

261. Foster, *The Union Politic*, 131.

262. Gillon, *Politics and Vision*, 41.

263. See "A Political Program for Liberals," November 1, 1948, ADA mf 106; Brock, *Americans for Democratic Action*, 50, 73, 164–65; Gillon, *Politics and Vision*, 41; Hubert Humphrey to Phillip

## CONCLUSION

What do you do if you belong to a small, unpopular group that wants something from the federal government? One answer is to join a political party. But what if powerful groups in both of the major parties are opposed to your group's program? That was the situation faced by African Americans in the 1930s. During the Great Depression, African Americans found themselves largely ignored in congressional and electoral politics.

Civil rights organization leaders decided to focus on alliances with other groups. They set aside longstanding grievances with labor unions and became their allies in the internecine fights of the Democratic Party, aiming to remake the Democratic Party as the vehicle of racial liberalism. By 1948, Democratic Party leaders were willing to unsettle a large, deeply entrenched faction of the party.

Impressive increases in black voter registration are insufficient to explain the behavior of northern Democrats. Democratic presidents, majority leaders, and party chairmen were more eager to keep peace between existing groups within the party than to satisfy the demands of a rising group. Civil rights groups were fortunate in that a new national union agreed that allying with blacks made strategic sense for them, too. The issue of civil rights became the uniting cause of the liberal-labor alliance. But the strategic decisions of civil rights groups, which were by no means obvious or easy at the time, were necessary to make it happen. For African Americans, the CIO became the most potent political supporter they had had since Reconstruction. The NAACP recognized the advantages of working with groups like the CIO over powerful politicians, rebuffing overtures from Republican leaders such as Taft and Dewey. National, hierarchical organizations deployed resources and mobilized people in the service of strategic decisions. The NAACP and the CIO were able to register and motivate voters who had been previously inactive, disenfranchised, or wavering. Both presented their members with political alternatives that affected their everyday lives in visible ways. In addition to these political advantages, the membership and financial resources of the two groups improved with their alliance.

Many historians and political scientists lament the opportunities the CIO and NAACP may have missed with the left. While they might have accomplished more with different choices, they accomplished much with the choices they made. African Americans still became a core constituency of the Democratic Party. The NAACP, its prestige enhanced by the *Brown* victory with labor's funding, became

Murray, March 30, 1949, Phillip Murray Papers, Box 143, Folder 14; and Foster, *The Union Politic*, 134.

increasingly bold about challenging labor—a sign of its secure position in the Democratic Party and the liberal coalition. It publicly confronted the AFL-CIO to address discrimination in its own ranks even as it continued to receive funding for its legal and legislative work from unions. It used the hated Taft-Hartley Act to prosecute discriminatory unions.<sup>264</sup> Executive Secretary Roy Wilkins knew that the AFL-CIO needed to keep supporting the NAACP to maintain its liberal image and its role as a leader in the New Deal coalition.<sup>265</sup> In the 1960s, the civil rights movement had moved faster than UAW president Walter Reuther would have liked, but he could not slow its

momentum if he wanted the union to maintain its legitimacy among progressives.<sup>266</sup>

In other words, an underrepresented group used strategic organizational alliances to obtain representation in the Democratic Party. Political scientists are beginning to study the effect of organizations on the partisan civil rights transformation, but they have not examined the timing and motivation behind strategic organizational decisions. Politicians did not fully recognize the demands of a new group until strategic organizations mobilized them and forced parties to choose a side. Realigning before the party itself, groups were “first to the party.”

264. Robert L. Carter to branch presidents, August 31, 1964, Mf supplement to Part 13, r11.

265. August Meier and John Bracey, “The NAACP as a Reform Movement, 1909–1965: ‘To Reach the Conscience of America,’” *Journal of Southern History* 59(1993): 3–30.

266. Lichtenstein, *Walter Reuther*, 379.