

‘Opening Pandora’s Box’:

Richard Nixon, South Carolina, and the Southern Strategy, 1968-1972

Submitted by Edward Adkins of Pembroke College for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Table of Contents

Shorter Abstract		3
Longer Abstract		5
Acknowledgements		10
Introduction	The Southern Strategy in Historical Perspective	11
Chapter I	1968's Odd Couple: Richard Nixon, Strom Thurmond and South Carolina Politics	21
Chapter II	After the Revolution: Richard Nixon, The Southern Strategy and Presidential Power, 1969	69
Chapter III	Getting Hit From Both Sides: The Nixon Administration Reaches A Time for Choosing	117
Chapter IV	The Southern Strategy Unravels: Politics versus Principle during the Mass Desegregation of South Carolina Schools	165
Chapter V	From There to Where? Nixon's Southern Strategy Remade	s 227

Shorter Abstract

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Much discussed and little understood, Richard Nixon's southern strategy demands scrutiny. A brief survey of the literature suggests that study on this controversial topic has reached an impasse. Southern historians keen to emphasise the importance of class in the region's partisan development over the last fifty years insist that any southern strategy predicated on racialised appeals to disaffected white conservatives was doomed to failure. Conversely, conventional accounts of the Nixon era remain wedded to the view that the southern strategy represented a successful devil's bargain whereby an avaricious Californian exchanged the promise of racial justice for black southerners in return for white Dixie's electoral votes. Most sobering of all are political scientists concerned with executive power, who evidence the limited discretion enjoyed by presidents to implement any agenda inimical to the corporate will of the federal bureaucracy. Since Nixon's executive departments were brimming with Democratic holdovers from the Kennedy and Johnson years, the question of whether or not the President demanded concessions to southern racists apparently becomes more or less irrelevant: the 'fourth branch' of the federal government inevitably ensured that a southern strategy was simply impossible to execute.

In reality, much of this stalemate is the product of academic territorial warfare on the battleground of a subject wide open to multiple interpretations. A southern historian keen to showcase the importance of his local research is likely to show little interest in evidence that a President based in Washington D.C. could initiate social change in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. Similarly, political scientists fighting an unrewarding battle to emphasise the autonomy of federal departments are naturally disinclined to highlight examples of presidential willpower altering bureaucratic culture. Nevertheless, an intriguing paradox remains in evidence. Despite leaning more towards the political philosophy of antediluvian white southerners than the demands of

black Americans, Richard Nixon presided over a period of such fundamental social reconstruction below the Mason-Dixie line that he could legitimately claim to have desegregated more southern schools than any other President in history.

Whilst a raft of excellent monologues demonstrating the impact of local movements down South on national politics have been published over the last decade, few have even attempted to explain this peculiar phenomenon. As Matthew Lassiter observed in a *Journal of American History* roundtable on American conservatism in December 2011, 'the recent pendulum swing has overstated the case for a rightward shift in American politics by focusing too narrowly on partisan narratives and specific election cycles rather than on the more complex dynamics of political culture, political economy, and public policy.' The purpose of this thesis is to explain how a President notorious for pursuing the votes of white segregationists rested at the head of a federal government that ruthlessly dismantled Jim Crow. By incorporating the range of methodologies elucidated above, it will identify exactly how much influence President Nixon and his executive officers exerted over civil rights policy. Was Nixon's reactionary agenda thwarted by over-mighty bureaucrats? Or did the President act more responsibly than the majority of commentators have admitted?

Longer Abstract

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The last decade has witnessed a welcome flurry of post-war histories of place recalibrating our understanding of national political development. Lisa McGirr, Becky Nicolaides, and Robert Self have all traced the Reagan Revolution back to local California battles over space, resources and identity that complicate the dominant national narrative of civil rights gains and white backlash. The majority of new writing, though, has focused on the South. The region described by Franklin Roosevelt as 'the nation's number one economic problem' in 1938 has recently leapt into our historical consciousness as the core engine of change in post-WW2 America. Whilst differing in their analyses, the trio of Kevin Kruse, Matthew Lassiter and Joseph Crespino have all emphasised Dixie's essential contribution to shaping the modern United States. Merle and Earl Black, the noted political scientists, entitled their study of the region *The Vital South*. Surveying the nation's electoral history from the New Deal to George H.W. Bush's victory in 1988, the Blacks concluded that 'as the South goes, so goes the nation.' As the South trended Republican, so the nation's electoral map became awash in a sea of red.

Conventional analysis insists that white racism is the key to this story. After the deluge of federal statutes, court rulings and executive orders in the decade after *Brown v. Board of Education*, the white South went 'in search of another country.' A national Republican Party suffering the agony of a landslide defeat in the 1964 presidential election represented its best chance. Four years after the Goldwater debacle, Senator Strom Thurmond, South Carolina's political-party nomad, forged an alliance with the Republican's most acceptable, electable candidate: Richard Nixon. Desperate to court vital white southern votes, Nixon made noises simultaneously pleasing to the region's white electorate and inoffensive to ears outside Dixie. As President, Nixon continued to present himself as more concerned with white backlash than black civil rights. So

effective were Nixon's efforts in the fall of 1969 Roy Wilkins, executive secretary of the NAACP, bitterly complained that, 'It's almost enough to make you vomit. This is not a matter of too little, too late. Rather it's a matter of doing nothing at all.' As Republicans came to dominate presidential elections not just down South, but across the nation, liberal commentators cried foul. In 1992, *Washington Post* journalist Thomas Byrne Edsall insisted that the GOP's programme really represented a 'top-down' coalition proselytising low taxes and racial discrimination.

Much of this analysis is fair. As Lee Atwater, southern strategist for both Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush's successful presidential campaigns, explained to political scientist Alexander P. Lamis, the premise of Republican campaigning down South was simple,

'You start out in 1954 by saying "Nigger, nigger, nigger." By 1968 you can't say "nigger" - that hurts you. Backfires. So you say stuff like forced busing, states' rights, and all that stuff. You're getting so abstract now [that] you're talking about cutting taxes...'

Atwater's breathtaking cynicism was hardly unique. After leaving the White House, Nixon's political advisor for the South, Harry Dent, indulged in a guilt-racked interview with the *Washington Post* lamenting 'anything I did that stood in the way of the rights of black people.' These sins were capacious, including circulating a picture of South Carolina Governor Robert McNair shaking hands with an African-American voter to win votes for his GOP opponent. White backlash against black civil rights was crucial to Republican advancement down South.

Nevertheless, a historical problem exists. Despite often indulging in racially polarising campaigning, Republican Presidents have also presided over an era of civil rights advancement. Comparisons between Richard Nixon and Rutherford B. Hayes have proven fallacious. Even Ronald Reagan, perhaps the most egregious example of a United States President attacking the movement for black equality, was frustrated in his attempts to reverse the course of black equality under the law. The presidency of Richard Nixon represents the most severe example of cognitive dissonance. Derided by civil rights activists as the patsy of white segregationists, the Nixon Administration built on its predecessor's legacy to secure the future of

desegregated southern schools, affirmative action programs in government contracts, and a limited foray into minority business set-asides. Nevertheless, it did so under a President whose commitment to these causes has been rightfully described as 'shallow, intellectual, and abstract rather than intense, emotional, and engaged.'

This thesis argues that the exigencies of governance frustrated Richard Nixon's ambitions to cultivate southern Republicanism. Whereas Matthew Lassiter and Byron Shafer have emphasised class as a counterweight to the pernicious influence of race in U.S. politics, the following chapters demonstrate that the responsibilities and structures of executive power limited how far white racism could be instituted as public policy. Privately, Nixon personally believed that the Supreme Court was 'right on *Brown* and wrong on *Green*,' by which he meant that a distinction had to be drawn between legal desegregation and more aggressive efforts to effectively integrate schools. Nevertheless, as President he was compelled to either defy the judiciary and court civil disorder, or to implement the wholesale dismantling of Jim Crow schools down South. Feeling that he had no option, Nixon chose the latter course. By the summer of 1970, the President worried less about white segregationist's votes, and more that 'the racist dogs will be in full cry & will affect the decent people.'

As Chapters Three and Four of this thesis demonstrate, when confronted with a binary choice between compliance or defiance, President Nixon chose to follow the rule of law; however problematic it was for his southern Republican supporters. This decision was not a question of morals. Rather, it demonstrated that good governance could also represent smart politics. Fearful of the prospect of mass disorder down South, Nixon chose to pursue an emollient strategy rather than fomenting dissent and discord. After the presidential message on school desegregation of March 1970, Nixon's southern strategy became as much about forming State Advisory Committees to help peaceful compliance with integration mandates as it was about installing Republican acolytes into elected positions across Dixie. That summer the President learned that some southern Democrats were far more adept politicians than their GOP counterparts. Used to handling power, they realised that short-term electoral gain could be heavily outweighed by long-term consequences of demagogic actions. Southern Republicans did not. As a result, after their failure to secure even moderate gains in the 1970 midterm elections, Nixon marginalised his own party down South; instead cultivating

Democratic alliances in the region through Congress and even his own Cabinet.

Where did this leave Nixon's southern strategy? Using the state of South Carolina as a case study, this thesis demonstrates that, like the President's commitment to civil rights, the strategy was far more 'symbolic than substantive.' Chapter Two demonstrates that the Nixon White House abandoned even the pretence of favouring southern Republicans. Notably, Administration officials insisted on meeting party officials in a secret location lest the Washington press slant the arrangements as further evidence of a Nixon southern strategy. Moreover, the patronage and school desegregation commitments proffered by Nixon and proselytised by Strom Thurmond during the 1968 presidential election simply did not materialise. The first eighteen months of the Nixon presidency proved a sobering experience for South Carolina and southern Republicans alike. As the Final Chapter evidences, the second half of Nixon's first term proved even more disillusioning for them. The most galling result of Nixon's decision to court southern state establishments was that prestigious court appointments were awarded to prominent Democrats rather than worthy GOP apparatchiks.

Most surprising was Strom Thurmond's metamorphosis from 'the clown of the Senate' into a veritable Nixon Administration insider. Integral to Nixon's nomination and election in 1968, Thurmond carefully capitalised on his advantageous relationship with the incoming Administration to secure a wealth of patronage. Whilst persistently disappointed with the Nixon Administration's unwillingness to battle effectively against school desegregation mandates, even this veritable party rebel enjoyed the trappings of power and influence too much to break with President Nixon. Perhaps the most striking example is provided in Chapter Three which demonstrates that Strom Thurmond actually advised South Carolina school districts to accept complete desegregation plans rather than risk further federal intervention. Thurmond's greater maturity as a public figure epitomised just how much the experience of executive power shaped politicians' sense of personal responsibility, even when that role was limited to a White House ally on Capitol Hill.

Although the exigencies of party politics meant Nixon was compelled to court South Carolina Republicans in 1968, the President was much more similar to Palmetto Democrats in the nuances of thinking and grand

sweep of strategising. Nixon bore far more similarity to the state's Governor Robert McNair than an ideologue like Strom Thurmond. This was perhaps truer for South Carolina than any other southern state. In the summer of 1970, Richard Nixon personally commended the South Carolina Democratic establishment for the quality of the State Advisory Committee they formed to ensure smooth transition to a unitary school system. The broad alliance of civic leaders mirrored the state establishment's treatment of desegregation mandates for almost a decade. Appalled and fearful of racial violence being visited on South Carolina, a coalition of senior politicians, businessmen and public administrators had formed 'the conspiracy of peace,' which sought to preserve civil order at any cost. Instructively, the South Carolina GOP had played no role in these plans. Once ensconced in power, Nixon's southern strategy became far more concerned with southern Democrats' cool pragmatism than the hotheadedness of their Republican counterparts. Allied to their control of southern political infrastructure, alliances with southern Democrats presented a far more attractive option for Richard Nixon. In short, the New Republican Majority envisaged by strategist Kevin Phillips would have to wait.

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Introduction

The Southern Strategy in Historical Perspective

On Friday 31 May, 1968, presidential candidate Richard Nixon, fresh from victory in the Oregon GOP primary, landed in Atlanta, Georgia, 'trying to bind up most of the southern delegates in a neat bundle.' After an afternoon meeting with southern state chairman, Nixon held a press conference in which he generously declared, 'I think we can say in 1968 that we have a truly two-party system in the nation...the South has come of age.' Suitably impressed, Republican officials summoned Strom Thurmond, their *de facto* leader, to meet Nixon. Intrigued, Thurmond arrived in Atlanta on Saturday June 1 to confer with the prospective nominee.¹

That morning, what journalists later referred to as the 'Bargain of Atlanta' was struck. Having finalised the agreement with a drive to the airport, Thurmond told reporters that he was 'highly pleased' with Nixon's positions on the major issues. In similar tones, Georgia delegate J. Paul Jones declared the former Vice President 'a man who speaks our language.' Three weeks later, Thurmond announced that he and the South Carolina delegation would support Richard Nixon's candidacy for President. Admitting that he did not agree with Nixon on all issues, Thurmond insisted that the former Vice President remained 'the most acceptable and electable candidate' in the Republican field. What Richard Nixon promised Thurmond on June 1, 1968, is unclear. This opaqueness was almost certainly a deliberate ploy by the Californian, who simultaneously understood that, whilst Thurmond's support was 'essential', no electable national candidate could be too closely associated with the former Dixiecrat presidential aspirant. In essence, Nixon needed a southern strategy as well as a more moderate, broader appeal.²

¹ Remer Tyson, 'Nixon Here Today for Dixie Push,' *Atlanta Constitution* (31 May 1968); Remer Tyson, 'Nixon Here, Is Backed by 3 Dixie Chairmen; Aide Predicts Shoo-In' *Atlanta Constitution* (1 June 1968),

² Charles Pou & Hugh Nations, 'Nixon Nearing Magic Number: Candidate Touring South Wins Thurmond Blessing', *Atlanta Constitution* (June 2, 1968); Lewis Chester, Godfrey Hodgson, & Bruce Page, *An American Melodrama* (Andre Deutsch, 1969), p. 447; Hal Gulliver & Reg Murphy, *The Southern Strategy* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), p. 2.

For over four decades, commentators and historians alike have argued over the meaning of this southern strategy. Southern historians keen to emphasise the importance of class in the region's partisan development over the last fifty years insist that any southern strategy predicated on racialised appeals to disaffected white conservatives was doomed to failure. Conversely, conventional accounts of the Nixon era remain wedded to the view that the southern strategy constituted a devil's bargain whereby an avaricious Californian exchanged the promise of racial justice for black southerners in return for white Dixie's electoral votes. Meanwhile, political scientists concerned with executive power demonstrate the limited discretion enjoyed by presidents to implement any agenda inimical to the corporate will of the federal bureaucracy. Since Nixon's executive departments were brimming with Democratic holdovers from the Kennedy and Johnson years, the question of whether or not the President demanded concessions to southern racists apparently becomes more or less irrelevant: the 'fourth branch' of the federal government inevitably ensured that a southern strategy was simply impossible to execute.³

An intriguing paradox remains. Despite leaning more towards the political philosophy of segregationist white southerners than the demands of black Americans, Richard Nixon presided over a period of such fundamental social reconstruction below the Mason-Dixie line that he could legitimately claim to have desegregated more southern schools than any other President in history.⁴

Whilst a raft of excellent monologues demonstrating the impact of local movements down South on national politics have been published over the last decade, few have even attempted to explain this peculiar phenomenon. As Matthew Lassiter observed during a *Journal of American History* roundtable about

³ For examples of such southern history in action, see Matthew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority* (Princeton University Press, 2005) and Byron Shafer & Richard Johnson, *The End of Southern Exceptionalism* (Harvard University Press, 2006); for a typical unfavourable Nixon account see Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland* (Scribner, 2008) or Kenneth O' Reilly, *Nixon's Piano* (The Free Press, 1995); political scientists have been beating the presidential impotence drum since at least Richard Neustadt, *Presidential Power* (Wiley, 1960), but the modern standard bearer remains Hugh Davis Graham, *The Civil Rights Era* (Oxford University Press, 1990). For recent examples of bureaucratic power, see: John Skrentny, *The Minority Rights Revolution* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002); Daniel P. Carpenter, *Reputation and Power* (Princeton University Press, 2010) & 'How Wasteful and Ineffective Is Airport Security?', *Newsweek* (March 19, 2012).

⁴ The point was not lost on Nixon, although he never framed it quite as boldly: see Richard Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (Sidgwick & Jackson, 1978), p. 443.

American conservatism in December 2011, 'the recent pendulum swing has overstated the case for a rightward shift in American politics by focusing too narrowly on partisan narratives and specific election cycles rather than on the more complex dynamics of political culture, political economy, and public policy.' The purpose of this thesis is to explain how a President notorious for pursuing the votes of white segregationists rested at the head of a federal government that ruthlessly dismantled Jim Crow. By incorporating the range of methodologies elucidated above, it will identify exactly how much influence President Nixon and his executive officers exerted over civil rights policy. Was Nixon's reactionary agenda thwarted by over-mighty bureaucrats? Or did the President act more responsibly than the majority of commentators have admitted?⁵

The lack of attention paid to this historical problem is unsurprising, since the Nixon Administration's strong civil rights record was at odds with the President's politics and personal attitudes. Historians like Joan Hoff, Dean Kotlowksi and Gareth Davies have rightly tried to move the debate away from litmus tests of Nixon's ideological purity, and towards a more detached analysis of his Administration's contribution to civil rights reform.⁶ After all, Nixon's predecessors hardly enjoyed impeccable records on this issue. The same Lyndon Johnson who infamously refused to seat black delegates from the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party at the 1964 Democratic convention soon railroaded two landmark civil rights bills through Congress.⁷

In a similar vein, John Kennedy shored up political and electoral support in a region suspicious of his Catholicism and ultra-Yankee credentials by making almost exclusively pro-segregationist appointments to the southern bench. Indeed, four out of President Kennedy's eight appointees to Deep South benches 'wilfully obstructed the efforts of the Justice Department to enforce the law.' In August 1963, the SNCC's John Lewis famously enquired, 'which side is the federal government on?' Despite this scepticism, the Kennedy Administration still acted decisively in combating the constitutional defiance of George Wallace's 'stand in

⁵ Matthew D. Lassiter, 'Political History Beyond the Red-Blue Divide', *Journal of American History* 98:3 (December 2011), p. 760.

⁶ Joan Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered* (Basic Books, 1994); Dean Kotlowksi, *Nixon's Civil Rights* (Harvard University Press, 2001); Gareth Davies, *See Government Grow* (University Press of Kansas, 2007).

⁷ Tom Wicker, 'Mississippi Delegates Withdraw', *New York Times* (August 26, 1964)

the schoolhouse door' a month later in September 1963. Inglorious electioneering apart, both Kennedy and Johnson have received relatively favourable assessments by historians for their respective civil rights records.⁸

The problem of studies like Dan Carter's *The Politics of Rage* and Kenneth O'Reilly's *Nixon's Piano* is their tendency to assume that a President's personal racial views are of inexorable historical consequence. In 2007, historian Timothy Thurber cautioned that, 'scholars must avoid painting too straight a line between Goldwater and later politics and policy.' The point was well taken. Dan Carter, for example, produces volumes of evidence regarding the cynicism of particular White House operatives, as well as substantial proof that Nixon thought more with his brain than his heart when dealing with minority rights, without showing how these revelations matter in any wider context.⁹

Unsurprisingly, removing the imperative of moral judgement from discussion of Nixon's southern strategy reveals a far more nuanced and compelling dynamic. For example, historians have rarely considered Nixon's relationship with white southerners when discussing his political alliance with the region. Yet the former President's autobiography is littered with southern-friendly anecdotes and assessments, such as the extravagant praise he lavished on long-time Georgia Senator Richard Russell or his strong criticism of federal bureaucrats 'meddling' in the South's racial affairs. Nixon's White House papers demonstrate that such southern-friendly thinking was no post-presidency posture: meeting notes and Oval Office memos portray a President deeply concerned with what he believed to be the persecution of white southerners by a hypocritical national elite.¹⁰

⁸ Nick Carbone, 'George Wallace vs. the U.S. Government, 1963, *Time* (July 27, 2011); Allen J. Matusow, *The Unravelling of America* (University of Georgia Press, 2009); Stephen Tuck, 'Review', *Journal of American History* 88:1 (June 2001), p. 284; Jonathan Rosenberg & Zachary Karabell, *Kennedy, Johnson, and the Quest For Justice* (W.W. Norton, 2003). One Kennedy appointment, U.S. District Judge William Cox of Mississippi, openly referred to African-Americans as 'niggers' in his courtroom: see Jack Nelson, 'RFK Opposed Appointed Judge', *Washington Post* (August 2, 1971).

⁹ Dan Carter, *The Politics of Rage* (Simon & Schuster, 1995); Kenneth O'Reilly, *Nixon's Piano* (The Free Press, 1995); Timony N. Thurber, 'Goldwaterism Triumphant? Race and the Republican Party, 1965–1968', *The Journal of the Historical Society* 7:3 (September 2007), p. 349.

¹⁰ Richard Nixon, *Memoirs*, p. 441. For good examples of Nixon's personal bias towards the white South, see 'JDE Notes of Meetings with the President / 1/5/70 - 4/21/71 (6 of 6)', Box 5, Ehrlichman Files.

In a withering article for the *New York Review of Books* in February 1972, William Appleman Williams described Nixon's relationship with the white South as predicated on the ugly axis of prejudice and desperation 'to avoid having to terminate his lifelong flight forward.' Undoubtedly, elements of both underscored the southern strategy. Nixon's private comment during the 1968 presidential campaign that 'it's all about law and order and the damn Negro-Puerto Rican groups out there' would hardly have alienated southern conservatives, whilst the political alliance forged the same year with Strom Thurmond signalled desperation to avoid a repeat of the 1960 election result.¹¹

In line with Appleman Williams' assessment, President Nixon initially pursued a future for southern schools aimed at appeasing the white South. When recalcitrance and deliberate ambiguity failed, though, the White House elected to enforce court-ordered desegregation deadlines, and helped ensure compliance through a number of measures. An emergency fund designed to facilitate peaceful desegregation through programmes such as racial sensitivity training for teachers and extra-curricular activities evinced a keen awareness that the reconstruction of southern education could not prosper as an unfunded mandate, and aspired to curtail white protests that desegregation was inimical to the preservation of 'quality education.' Similarly, federally funded television adverts broadcast in the summer before the opening of mass desegregated schools, featuring evangelist Billy Graham urging parents to 'keep your cool, support your school,' emphasised the relationship between peaceful compliance and a positive learning environment. Whilst it is impossible to postulate alternative outcomes had the Administration taken a less consensual approach to school desegregation, such mollifying programmes undoubtedly contributed to the relative calm of school openings in the fall of 1970 and 1971. There is little mention of these programmes in mainstream historical literature.¹²

Alongside Kevin Kruse and Becky Nicolaides, Matthew Lassiter has argued that Nixon was a tool of well-

¹¹ William Appleman Williams, 'Excelsior', *New York Review of Books* (February 24, 1972), p. 8; Dan Carter, *The Politics of Rage*, p. 348.

¹² 'Vice President Richard Nixon Answers Questions About Civil Rights' (c.1960), 'Civil Rights', Box 1, 1960 Campaign -- PPS 74, Nixon Papers, Nixon Library; Gareth Davies, *See Government Grow*, pp. 109-140; The Cabinet Committee on Education, 'Infoflow' (September 18, 1970), Box 3, Cabinet Committee on Education, Finch Papers, Nixon Library.

heeled suburbanites desperate to preserve their lilywhite communities from the perceived threat of minority residents. Kruse and Lassiter further argue that Nixon's electoral coalition heralded an emerging alliance between suburbanites and southern reactionaries. In one journalist's contemporary imagination, George Wallace had realised of the wider American electorate: 'my God, they're all southern!' Nevertheless, there remained an ideological distance between white suburban moderation and the reactionary agenda of many Deep South whites. Nixon still had to accrue a substantial proportion of his southern votes in places like Natchez, Mississippi, where white women responded to the *Alexander v. Holmes* school desegregation decision in 1969 by flooding local physicians with requests for contraception. Although an extreme example, it is indicative of how deep segregationist feeling could run in the South.¹³

This thesis submits two superficially contradictory conclusions. Attention is paid to just how racially charged Nixon's 1968 campaign became in the Deep South, and how far the Nixon White House's rhetoric on civil rights resonated with white southerners disaffected with the pace of racial change. For many white southerners, a presidential platform invoking 'freedom of choice' in schools, for example, meant the right to send your child to a segregated institution. Still, once ensconced in the Oval Office the broad trend of Nixon's efforts was designed to impose a self-styled rationality onto civil rights policy. This did not include defying federal court orders, however much the white South supported such action. Unsurprisingly, a coherent school desegregation policy for a President elected with the votes of few African-Americans but many white southerners proved initially elusive, but by the summer of 1970 Nixon had decided to act firmly to implement court-ordered desegregation. Well-publicised peace offerings to the white South soothed, but did not alter, the reconstruction of southern education.¹⁴ The yawning gap between rhetoric and action infuriated and confounded Nixon's supporters in Dixie.

The following chapters sharpen these themes by focusing on one Deep South state. South Carolina is important in both specific and general terms to understanding the southern strategy. Its senior Senator, the

¹³ Matthew Lassiter, *Silent Majority*, esp. p. 157. 'Schools Reeling in Dixie' *Atlanta Constitution* (November 24, 1969).

¹⁴ The phrase is borrowed from Gary Orfield, *The Reconstruction of Southern Education* (Wiley, 1969).

partisan chameleon Strom Thurmond, proved crucial to Nixon's capture of four southern states in the 1968 election; whilst Thurmond's principal political advisor, Harry Dent, became in-house 'southern counsel' to the Nixon White House. As an essential part of its narrative, South Carolina represents a paradigmatic example of the southern strategy in operation. Since Richard Nixon owed Strom Thurmond a greater debt than anyone else in the South, it follows that the shape and effect of the southern strategy should be easiest to identify in that state.

South Carolina also provides a compelling landscape for a southern case study, since this most conservative of states largely responded to the civil rights movement with 'firm flexibility.' With the exception of the police killings of three black youths in Orangeburg in February 1968, the state boasted a comparatively civil record of black-white relations during the noisy 1960s and into the 1970s.¹⁵ How did a state that kept a monument to the monstrous Ben Tillman on its Capitol steps well into the twenty-first century manage to avoid the ghoulish excesses visited on black southerners in Mississippi and Alabama? And what was President Nixon's role in the rise and abatement of racial tension in South Carolina during the period?

Research for this thesis began with the conventional assumption that the Nixon presidency and the white South were locked in a destructive embrace; an embrace that squeezed the momentum out of civil rights reform. This was not the case. The following pages do not exonerate the conduct of Nixon and his key lieutenants in shamelessly seeking to exploit racial tension. Nor do they particularly sympathise with the claim that southern Republicanism grew out of socio-economic conservatism rather than white backlash. Instead of purely focusing on personalities, what follows is concerned with how institutional forces and exigencies conditioned behaviour and, ultimately, policy. How else to reconcile the two faces of Strom Thurmond in the summer of 1970: the hard-core Dixiecrat who took to the Senate floor to blast Nixon for tacking to the left on civil rights, whilst privately cajoling South Carolina school boards to accept the reality of massive school desegregation?

¹⁵ The most comprehensive account of the Orangeburg Massacre is: Jack Bass & Jack Nelson, *The Orangeburg Massacre* (Mercer University Press, 1984).

A reactionary streak undoubtedly ran through the Nixon Administration. As this thesis shows, that streak was blunted by other impulses in the battle over civil rights enforcement. Judges and federal bureaucrats formed a near-impenetrable wall to ensure that the Nixon White House could make only the most limited of concessions for influential southerners. Whilst high profile, these concessions tended to be of minimal long-term significance. Even more strikingly, the experience of executive power complicated Nixon's approach to civil rights enforcement. Initially favouring confrontation with the courts, the President considered the range of options presented by his staffers and pulled back: telling aides that, 'there's only mileage in this for demagogues. Fine for a man who *wants* to be Governor but not for a man who *has* to be President.' Concluding that the only responsible course of action was to enforce judicial mandates, Nixon even supported the creation of White House sponsored committees designed to smooth the passage of massive school desegregation down South.¹⁶

Safety valves existed to sustain sensitive policy commitments against political attack, and ensured that the promises laid down by Strom Thurmond and Richard Nixon during the presidential election of 1968 could not be realised. This came as no surprise to senior South Carolina state officials, whose experience of federal power was that civil rights enforcement could not be derailed by a single national election. Once in office, Nixon tacked away from the demands of southern Republicans, and instead conformed to a more nuanced, pragmatic style. In essence, the southern strategy did not work because it required Nixon to act as a supercharged party builder instead of dispassionate President. Chapters Two and Three detail the political and policy disruption caused by Nixon's efforts to combine the two.

President Nixon's 'dilemma' was neatly summarised in the summer of 1969 by a long-time political ally stationed at the troublesome federal department of Health, Education and Welfare. 'How do we make good on campaign statements,' lamented Patrick Gray in a private memo, 'which when uttered were not supported by sound research and not based upon the first hand look we now have into the perils of Pandora's box of Civil Rights questions?' As Gray learned through in-depth exposure to its everyday administration, federal enforcement of civil rights was not amenable to the type of reform hungrily demanded by crowds on the

¹⁶ H.R. Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries* (G.P. Putnam Son's, 1994), p. 130.

Dixie campaign trail. Having advocated change on the podium, once in office Nixon found his civil rights policy painted by the media in two-tone colours: as either a concession to the white South, or alternatively a repudiation of his 'southern strategy.' Chapter Four demonstrates how the Nixon Administration, albeit reluctantly, managed to transcend such destructive point-scoring in the summer of 1970.¹⁷

The final chapter is a sobering reminder that the battle for racial justice did not end with the desegregation of southern schools. Neither did the triumph of southern 'moderation', exemplified by the 1970 midterms, necessarily pave the way for an equitable system of race relations. In South Carolina, the moderate white elite was more concerned with keeping a lid on racial tension than in advocating genuine reform. Just like President Nixon's reluctance to portray civil rights as a moral cause, this standpoint garnered credibility amongst white southerners reluctant to cast off Jim Crow. It aided the smooth transition to a unitary school system, but equally ensured only a bare minimum commitment to racial reform.

This sobering reality is mirrored in the relative paucity of source material pertaining to African-American perspectives and contributions to the process of racial change in South Carolina. This is partly due to the financial constraints on archives, but also because African-Americans were largely excluded from this process. Efforts for more black representation in government under the administrations of Robert McNair and John West should not obscure the fact that white men remained in charge of the Palmetto State. During the 1960s, their racial attitudes adapted to a new reality of federal intervention and black enfranchisement. Nevertheless, men like McNair and West were deeply sceptical of substantive reform, whilst reactionary politicians like Thurmond remained volubly opposed. Appetite for genuine social reform was barely noticeable in mainstream politics.

In *Strom Thurmond's America*, Joseph Crespino argued that the Thurmond should be remembered as 'one of the first of the post-World War II Sunbelt conservatives, a fact often eclipsed by his racial politics.' By doing so, Crespino believed the segregationist roots of Sunbelt conservatives would be better understood. In recent years, scholarship has proliferated on the this aspect of the new conservative movement. Kevin Kruse's

¹⁷ Pat Gray to Robert Finch (c. late June 1969), 'Civil Rights: 1969, June 20-30', Box 1, Finch Papers.

Atlanta-centric *White Flight*, for example, attempts to demonstrate the links between hard-right groups like the Ku Klux Klan with the Republicanism that flourished in the city from mid-century onwards.¹⁸

The novelty of GOP growth should not blind historians to the durability of 'Bourbon' conservatism¹⁹ in the southern states: that Democratic vision of civil order and traditional social values married to a tacit acceptance of federal government's role in economic development.²⁰ These were the political heirs to Senator Richard Russell, who responded to Thurmond's marathon filibuster against the 1957 Civil Rights Act by accusing the South Carolinian of 'treason against the South' for inviting harsher federal intrusion for the sole purpose of 'personal aggrandizement.' Not progressive but pragmatic, men like Ernest Hollings and Robert McNair were willing and experienced in exerting strong top-down leadership. Theirs was not a liberal tradition, but one in which 'issues became subservient to style.' That style did not seek to dramatically reform southern society, but it did accept that the segregationists resisting civil rights enforcement were not waving but drowning.²¹

The irony of Richard Nixon's 'southern strategy' was that the President eventually found his most useful political allies in Dixie were, in fact, southern Democrats: well-trained in the art of careful obfuscation towards federal guidelines and the entrenchment of a select white elite. Over time, Nixon realised that the majority of southern Republicans had little interest in doing anything beyond opening the Pandora's box of civil rights and hoping to capitalise on the ensuing mayhem. Once ensconced in the White House, Nixon found that such recklessness did not befit the 'man who *has* to be President', and quietly, reluctantly, winched the lid shut.

¹⁸ Joseph Crespino, *Strom Thurmond's America* (Hill and Wang, 2012), p. 6; Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 44.

¹⁹ Numan Bartley has described Bourbon governments as favouring 'economic development' alongside 'social stability, low taxes, and limited government.' See: Numan V. Bartley, 'In Search of the New South: Southern Politics after Reconstruction', *Reviews in American History* 10:4 (December 1982), p. 154.

²⁰ The durability of southern Democrats in Georgia has recently been explored in Tim S.R. Boyd, *Georgia Democrats, The Civil Rights Movement, and the Shaping of the New South* (University Press of Florida, 2012).

²¹ James G. Banks, *Strom Thurmond and the Revolt Against Modernity* (University Microfilms, 1971), p. 264; Randy Sanders, *Mighty Peculiar Elections* (Louisiana State University Press, 2002), p. 6.

Chapter I

1968's Odd Couple:

Richard Nixon, Strom Thurmond and South Carolina Politics

At half-past ten on the morning of Friday October 4, 1968, Spartanburg Memorial Auditorium opened its doors to a frenzied flood of youthful South Carolinians. In the parking lots beyond, buses dropped off students from college campuses state-wide. Battered by autumnal winds, an oversized inflatable elephant floated in the sky overhead. Emblazoned with the slogan, 'Nixon's The One,' this party symbol once reviled across the South now proudly heralded the impending arrival of that year's Republican nominee for the White House, Richard Nixon. His visit was the first time that a presidential candidate had ever campaigned in Spartanburg, South Carolina. Such was the local clamour that the city's Democratic mayor even proclaimed that Friday 'Nixon Day' in Spartanburg. Inside the Memorial Auditorium, the crowd 'roared and screamed' their candidate's name for three straight hours. By eleven o'clock, the main auditorium's 3,500 seats were full; more than two hours before the candidate's scheduled arrival. Undeterred, thousands more supporters crowded into the adjacent arena to follow proceedings on closed-circuit television.¹

Greeted by high-school band music and girls sporting Nixon t-shirts, one local reporter observed with surprise that the spectacle had more the atmosphere of a country fair than a professional political operation. A performance by country-music star Roy Acuff during the warm-up only reinforced this impression. The rather disorientating mixture of traditional Dixie culture and presidential electioneering reflected the efforts of Strom Thurmond, South Carolina's senior U.S. Senator. A perpetual partisan chameleon who eventually found a home as the region's Republican flag-bearer, in that year's presidential election Thurmond served as

¹ 'Youth Dominated Nixon Greeters in Two Cities', *Spartanburg Herald-Journal* (October 6, 1968); 'Spartanburg Auditorium Overflows for Nixon's Speech', *Rock Hill Evening Herald* (October 4, 1968); 'Nixon Counts on Strom Support', *Sumter Daily Item* (October 5, 1968); 'Candidate Nixon Tells Audience', *Spartanburg Herald* (October 5, 1968).

Nixon's principal spokesman throughout Dixie. As one New York Times sub-editor by-lined, 'Ex-Democrat, Ex-Dixiecrat,' Thurmond was now 'Today's "Nixiecrat"'.²

Both men had good reasons to enter into this alliance. For Richard Nixon, it represented the best hope for 'cutting off at the pass' a challenge from the right in either the primary or general election. Notorious for his reactionary, tub-thumping rhetoric and little else, Strom Thurmond aspired to wield national influence should his candidate reach the White House. Nevertheless, this compact of convenience also presented severe problems for both parties. After the Goldwater debacle of 1964, Richard Nixon was expected to campaign for the presidency as a centrist candidate. If the segregationist Thurmond was seen to influence the Californian in unpalatable ways, Nixon might expect to suffer the same fate as Senator Barry Goldwater four years earlier. As the influential Republican moderate George Romney lectured Goldwater in the aftermath of that disastrous election, a campaign targeting voters of 'Southern-rural-white orientation' constituted inevitable disaster at the ballot box.³

The alliance represented an even greater risk for Strom Thurmond. Embodying the 1948 Dixiecrat rebellion, Thurmond had carved his career out of damning northern politicians for interfering in southern race relations. Given Richard Nixon's firm support for every important piece of federal civil rights reform from *Brown* to the 1968 Civil Rights Act, Strom Thurmond's decision to back Nixon requires further elucidation. This chapter will explain how Thurmond and South Carolina travelled from staunch advocates of the Dixiecrat agenda to backing a moderate Republican candidate for President. It will also outline how Thurmond's political style represented an insurgency against the Democratic establishment in the Palmetto State; an establishment that prioritised peaceful compliance with federal civil rights decrees over Lost Cause defiance, and was actually far more in tune with the national political mainstream than Nixon's erstwhile ally.

This chapter will demonstrate that, whilst an effective political campaigner, Thurmond's concept of

² 'Spartanburg Auditorium Overflows'; Don Oberdorfer, 'Ex-Democrat, Ex-Dixiecrat, Today's "Nixiecrat"', *New York Times* (October 6, 1968).

³ George Romney to Barry Goldwater (December 21, 1964), 'Goldwater, Barry, 1964, Sept – Dec (2 of 2)', Campaign 1968 Collection - Appearance File (PPS 140) - Box 3, Nixon Library.

governance was recklessly short-termist. As Democratic politicians like Robert McNair and Ernest Hollings demonstrated, not all white southern officials reflexively bowed to the weight of segregationist public opinion. Although the Republican Senator proved extremely effective at swinging southern states into Nixon's column on election day, this curious alliance between the radical Dixiecrat and centrist ex-Vice-President was a house built on sand at low tide. By choosing to align himself with South Carolina Republicans, Nixon created a fundamental problem for his Administration even before taking office.

Richard Nixon and Strom Thurmond: The Odd Couple

Campaigning for the Republican nomination, such thoughts were far from Richard Nixon's mind. During the campaign, Nixon's staff were so desperate to deal with his 'loser' reputation that they passed out cards detailing the checkered electoral records of great leaders like Churchill and Lincoln. Consequently, the prospect of shoring up a southern flank threatened by the reactionary candidacies of Ronald Reagan and George Wallace was tantalising. For a politician who deeply prized his independence, Senator Thurmond's support was as unusual as it was invaluable. In 1960, the *New York Times* credited Senator Thurmond with the ability to swing 50,000 votes in South Carolina. Such extensive influence was at least partially derived from the rarity of a Thurmond endorsement. Richard Nixon discovered this for himself in 1960. Despite strongly implying that he favoured Nixon over the Democratic nominee John Kennedy, that year Senator Thurmond refused to publicly endorse either candidate.⁴

After defecting to the GOP in 1964, Thurmond continued to withhold his considerable political patronage. Months before Nixon's arrival in upstate South Carolina, Thurmond publicly announced that he would not campaign for any state Republican running for office that year. Aware that the GOP remained very much the minority party within the state, Strom Thurmond was highly sceptical about risking valuable political capital supporting his adopted party. Many South Carolina Republicans 'used to curse Strom with everything we

⁴ Thomas W. Evans, 'Discussant' in *Richard M. Nixon: Politician, President, Administrator*, edited by Leon Friedman & William F. Levantrosser (Greenwood Press, 1991), pp. 315-6; Claude Sitton, 'Gains By Kennedy Appear In South', *New York Times* (October 30, 1960).

had' when he refused to endorse party colleagues for office.⁵

Such reticence was equally applicable towards Nixon. Although Thurmond had served as chairman of the 'Solid South Speaks for Goldwater' committee in 1964, his association with a national politician who had just months earlier voted against the Civil Rights Act could easily be defended back home. In fact, Goldwater's selection as Republican presidential candidate played a crucial role in persuading Thurmond that it was safe to defect to the GOP. As late as 1961, Thurmond and Goldwater had an identical voting record on every major issue placed before the U.S. Senate.⁶

Campaigning for Richard Nixon represented a far more substantial risk to Thurmond's political reputation in the state. Whilst college students and affluent suburbanites flocked to Nixon's cause, many white South Carolinians still enchanted by Goldwater's ultra-conservatism held profound reservations about the former Vice President's decidedly moderate ideological inclinations. The state GOP was no exception. At the Republican National Convention of 1960, two prominent state committee members desperate for Barry Goldwater to challenge Nixon for the nomination had audaciously locked the Arizona Senator in a hotel bathroom until he agreed. When Goldwater secured the Republican presidential nomination from South Carolina's delegates in San Francisco four years later, state chairman Gregory D. Shorey waved the Palmetto flag so hard he broke the standard in two, lacerating his hand. Richard Nixon did not ignite such fervent passion. In the early spring of 1966, an associate editor of the *Columbia Record*, the state's largest Sunday newspaper, proselytised Nixon's candidacy on the pragmatic grounds that, 'his progressive conservatism, or Eisenhower Republicanism, offers his party the only realistic chance of appealing to the mass of the American electorate.' In 1968, Strom Thurmond had to cajole even his closest allies within the state delegation to remain loyal to Nixon. Little genuine enthusiasm existed for a candidate whom Goldwater had

⁵ Lee Bandy, 'Thurmond Endorses Parker for Senate', *The State* (June 5, 1968); Bob Dill, 'Greg Shorey Presented the Roger Milliken Lifetime Achievement Award', *The Greenville Times Examiner* (May 18, 2011): Accessed at www.timesexaminer.com on January 5, 2012; Russell Merritt, 'The Senatorial Election of 1962', *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 98:3 (July 1997), p. 289.

⁶ Jack Bass & Marilyn W. Thompson, *Ol Strom* (University of South Carolina Press, 2003), p. 196.

once held responsible for a 'Republican Munich' through appeasement of the party's liberal wing.⁷

Moreover, Nixon had fashioned his political comeback through centrist policies and indefatigable campaigning for GOP candidates of all ideological stripes, not by adopting Goldwater's uncompromising brand of right-wing Republicanism. As journalist James Naughton pertinently remarked, grassroots party activists and GOP officials across the nation were more likely to support Nixon because of the thirty-six states he visited on Goldwater's behalf in 1964. Since Richard Nixon's natural base tended towards party stalwarts rather than southern extremists, his candidacy was problematic for a South Carolina GOP fashioned out of ideological fundamentalism.⁸

Whereas Barry Goldwater had been sold to South Carolinian voters in 1964 as 'the man who stands WITH the South, not against it!', four years later Thurmond could only offer the decidedly ambiguous promise that Nixon would 'free our State and our Southland from discriminatory action.' When publicly challenged about how he could reconcile such statements with the former Vice President's uncompromising support for civil rights legislation, Thurmond offered nothing except the vague response that 'I do not agree with everything Richard Nixon stands for.' Such ambiguity exasperated even loyal Thurmond supporters. For the first time in his political career, the Senator was encouraged to 'SPEAK UP SO SOUTH CAROLINIANS WILL KNOW WHAT HE MEANS.' Fully aware that such a frank explanation would almost certainly torpedo Nixon's candidacy in the rest of the nation, Thurmond loyally continued to substitute equivocation for clarity.⁹

⁷ Bob Dill, 'Greg Shorey Presented'; William Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South* (Louisiana State University Press, 2005), p. 310; Harry Dent to Harrison Jenkins (March 1, 1966), 'Edens, J. Drake, Political Papers, General, 1961-1966', Box 1, Edens Papers; Philip G. Grose, 'S.C. Vote Is Still Nixon's' *The State* (August 5, 1968); News Release, 'Goldwater Calls Nixon-Rockefeller Meeting A Republican "Munich" ' (July 23, 1960), in 'Goldwater, Barry, 1960, Jan - July (2 of 2)', Box 2, 'Campaign 1968 Collection - Research Files (PPS 501)', Nixon Library.

⁸ The point has recently been emphasised as a counterweight to overly-deterministic accounts emphasising the inevitability of the GOP adopting ultra-conservative attitudes in the wake of Goldwater's candidacy. See Timothy N. Thurber, 'Goldwaterism Triumphant? Race and the Republican Party, 1965-1968', *The Journal of the Historical Society* 7:3 (September 2007).

⁹ James M. Naughton, 'Nelson (Zap) Rockefeller And Richard (Cool) Nixon', *New York Times* (July 28, 1968); A. James Reichley, *Conservatism in an Age of Change* (Brookings Institution, 1981), pp. 26-8; Campaign Poster, 'Stand with Barry Goldwater' (1964), 'Goldwater, Barry, political ads, 1964', Box 3, Lottie D. Hamby Papers, USCPC; Campaign Flyer, 'Thurmond Needs You To Elect Nixon' (1968), 'Publicity: Oct. 4-31, 1968, n.d.', Box 25, Clemson Papers.

Accordingly, Richard Nixon's visit to South Carolina represented, in the words of the *Washington Post*, as much a grateful 'hegira to Thurmondland' as dogged pursuit of the state's eight electoral votes. If Strom Thurmond could prise even a handful of southern states into the Nixon camp, the election might decisively swing against Humphrey and Wallace. On arriving at Greenville-Spartanburg Airport, the notoriously taciturn candidate ostentatiously threw an arm around Strom Thurmond's shoulders. The intensity of this display of appreciation was further explained by the numerous 'Wallace for President' signs defiantly vying for attention with the pro-Nixon placards amongst the airport crowd. These conflicting messages were representative of a schism in electoral opinion within the state that did not embrace the prospect of a Nixon presidency as fervently as either Thurmond or the candidate's acolytes in the Spartanburg Memorial Auditorium. In fact, a sizeable section of white South Carolina resented Thurmond's decision to embrace the former Vice President at the expense of George Wallace, Alabama's rumbustious political response to the decade's social tumult. Running that year as a third-party protest candidate, Wallace appeared to many southern voters the natural heir to Strom Thurmond's Dixiecrat rebellion against the national Democratic ticket in 1948. Importantly, Thurmond and Wallace's personal correspondence was minimal. Whilst pursuing similar themes and causes, it is instructive that neither sought out the counsel of the other. Their careers and ambitions had reached very different points.¹⁰

Thurmond's decision was far from easy. By rejecting Wallace in favour of a mainstream candidate, Senator Thurmond risked alienating a substantial section of his natural electoral constituency. A 'save Strom' petition that collected thousands of signatures across the state urged Thurmond to switch his support to George Wallace. Organised by Maurice Bessinger, a brazen segregationist, the petition publicly reminded the former Dixiecrat that Nixon 'is opposed to many of the things which you have supported in the past'; and that Wallace 'is now standing where you have so often stood.' Whilst respectful in tone, the petition's language was infused with a palpable sense of bafflement. Having built a career on what one biographer eloquently described as 'political fundamentalism [with] the assurity of spiritual truth and the rigidity of iron,' Strom Thurmond's willingness to tolerate Richard Nixon's ideological moderation in exchange for the uncertain

¹⁰ Chalmers M. Roberts, 'Nixon, Thurmond Stump S. Carolina', *Washington Post* (October 5, 1968); Lee Bandy, 'Thurmond Prestige On Line This Election', *The State & Columbia Record* (November 3, 1968).

prospect of genuine national influence appeared uncharacteristic and incongruous.¹¹

South Carolina and Presidential Politics

Whilst audacious, Strom Thurmond's gamble was consistent with South Carolina's promiscuous behaviour in presidential elections over the previous two decades. Ever since Governor Thurmond's third-party insurrection in 1948, the state's white voters had conducted a series of heady courtships and ugly compromises with a range of national candidates. As the federal government intensified reform of Jim Crow, unhappy South Carolinians desperately cast their presidential ballots in 'search of another country.' Their efforts proved wildly unsuccessful. John Shelton Reed has spoken of 'the string of no-hope losers who carried various southern states in presidential elections during this period.' In the five national elections prior to 1968, South Carolina backed the winning candidate only once: John F. Kennedy in 1960. The faith white South Carolinians tentatively expressed in a north-eastern Catholic went unrewarded. During the campaign, John Kennedy devoted a substantial portion of a thirty-minute televised speech in the state capital of Columbia to eulogising the legacy of John C. Calhoun. Once ensconced in the White House, though, Kennedy rolled out a 'New Frontier' program of social legislation, and cautiously backed civil rights demonstrators against southern segregationist custom.¹²

That state Republicans might benefit from national Democrats' unpopularity quickly became clear. President Kennedy's unpopularity in white South Carolina precipitated a momentous precedent in twentieth-century state politics. In August 1961, Charles E. Boineau became the first Republican official elected in the Palmetto State since Reconstruction by campaigning against 'the ultra-liberal Kennedy clan.' The General

¹¹ Petition 'To United States Senator Strom Thurmond', 'Correspondence: Miscellaneous', Box 25, Thurmond Papers; James G. Banks, 'Strom Thurmond and the Revolt Against Modernity' (PhD Thesis, Kent State University, 1971), p. 1.

¹² First quotation paraphrases Joseph Crespino, *In Search of Another Country: Mississippi and the Conservative Counterrevolution* (Princeton University Press, 2007); John Shelton Reed, 'Foreword', in *The Disappearing South?* (University of Alabama Press, 1990), p. viii; 'Nixon Tells Huge Crowd Here Kennedy Could Bungle Into War', *Columbia Record* (November 3, 1960), in 'RN - Nov 3, 1960 - Columbia, S.C., San Antonio, Houston, Fort Worth', Box 10, 1960 Campaign Series, PPS 43, Nixon Presidential Library.

Assembly candidate later ascribed his historic victory to the realisation that, 'Charlie Boineau could not beat [Democratic nominee] Joe Berry, but Charlie Boineau could beat Jack Kennedy.' Boineau's opponent arrived at a similar conclusion. In a futile attempt to disassociate his candidacy from the Kennedy White House, Berry implored the state Democratic party not to openly support him. As the President grew bolder in urging federal support for black equality, the state's earlier electoral support became ever more incongruous. White South Carolina responded with visceral antipathy. When news of Kennedy's assassination reached the state's classrooms on November 22, 1963, schoolchildren reportedly stood and clapped. The contrast between such ghoulish schadenfraude and the scenes of mourning elsewhere in the United States was striking.¹³

The unyoking of South Carolina from the national Democratic Party was very much a post-war phenomenon. During an interview conducted in 1978, Strom Thurmond explained that the Dixiecrat's electoral successes were so important precisely because they 'got the people to feel that if they didn't vote the national Democratic the sky wouldn't fall.' Prior to World War Two, South Carolina was a one-party state. As an integral component of the Solid South in the first half of the twentieth-century, the Palmetto State had demonstrated remarkable fidelity to Democratic presidential candidates. Between 1900 and 1944, not a single county in South Carolina gave a majority vote to any slate of electors other than the national Democratic Party.¹⁴

The state's support for Jack Kennedy in 1960 demonstrated the enduring power of such blind devotion to the Democratic ticket. At that year's Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles, Kennedy received support from just three percent of southern delegates. Consequently, his victory in South Carolina the following November took even Bobby Kennedy, Jack's campaign manager, by surprise. On being telephoned the result, he called for Jack Kennedy's attention and cautiously replied, 'Wait a minute. Don't pull my leg. We know

¹³ 'Text of acceptance speech by Charles E. Boineau Jr., Republican County Convention (July 17, 1961)' in 'Boineau 7/61', Box 3, Hamby Papers, USCPC; Charles Boineau Oral History Interview conducted by Wilma M. Woods (April 6, 1995), USCPC, p. 16; Ernest Hollings, *Making Government Work* (University of South Carolina Press, 2008), p. 72.

¹⁴ Oral History with Strom Thurmond, interviewed by Walter De Vries & Jack Bass (February 1, 1974), Interview A-166, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, p. 6; Donald L. Fowler, *Presidential Voting in South Carolina: 1948-1964* (University of South Carolina, 1966), p. 8; Earl & Merle Black, *The Vital South: How Presidents Are Elected* (Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 104.

South Carolina is going Republican.' The GOP was similarly blind-sided. Scanning the election results, Republican national chairman Len Hall reported that South Carolina remaining in the Democrat column was one of the two biggest surprises of the 1960 vote.¹⁵

Whilst Kennedy benefited that year, the phenomenon of 'yellow-dog' Democracy in South Carolina had already reached its apotheosis under President Franklin D. Roosevelt. On New Year's Day 1934, the *Columbia State* declared 'Thank God for Roosevelt.' South Carolina voters wholeheartedly agreed with such hyperbole. During the 1936 election, Governor Olin Johnston and his counterpart in Mississippi wagered on which state would produce a larger proportion of the vote for the President. Whilst Mississippi returned an extraordinary 97 percent for Roosevelt, Governor Johnston won the bet: 98.6 percent of South Carolina voters cast their ballots for the incumbent. Even the independently-minded Strom Thurmond realised that praising FDR represented sound politics. At the end of his 1944 gubernatorial campaign, Thurmond declared with typical bombast that President Roosevelt was the 'world's greatest leader.'¹⁶

Roosevelt skilfully wove together an unlikely biracial electoral coalition that attracted the loyalty of southern blacks whilst nurturing his party's historic bond with the region's white segregationists. Despite attending to the disproportionate economic plight of African-Americans down South, President Roosevelt consistently refused to address other issues of racial discrimination. Explaining his refusal to back an anti-lynching bill to the NAACP's Walter White, Roosevelt insisted that southern Democrats would respond by 'block[ing] every bill I ask Congress to pass to keep America from collapsing. I just can't take the risk.' Accordingly, the Roosevelt Administration tolerated breath-taking racism in its own programs. Evaluating the New Deal in South Carolina, J.I. Hayes concluded that 'most government programs not only maintained segregation but also discriminated in terms of pay and frequency of employment.' Measured against population ratios, African-Americans received about half the Civilian Conservation Corps assignments and four-tenths the National Youth Administration jobs to which they were entitled. Discrimination even pervaded the Federal

¹⁵ Ted Riley, interviewed by John J. Duffy & George D. Terry (October 7, 1986), USCPC, p. 13.

¹⁶ William E Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South: Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman & Lyndon Johnson* (Louisiana State University Press, 2005), pp. 51 & 53; Banks, 'Strom Thurmond', p. 144.

Writers' Project, which incorporated little of the text prepared by the Negro Writers' Project in its 1941 publication, *South Carolina – A Guide to the Palmetto State*. Veteran politician Ernest Hollings later characterised this phenomenon as a 'sweetheart deal' between the South and the national Democratic party; an informal arrangement whereby, 'we'll go along with your programs if you go along with our segregation.'¹⁷

The Solid South Shattered

This Machiavellian pact was only viable if both the Democratic Party and the South remained powerful political forces. By the end of World War Two, the South had lost a significant proportion of its influence. For a start, in 1936 the Democratic National Convention had voted to amend its longstanding rule whereby presidential nominees required the support of at least two-thirds of the delegates present. From 1940 onwards, Democratic presidential nominees needed only a simple majority to win. As Earl and Merle Black have argued, this amendment removed the *de facto* veto that southern delegates historically held over 'unacceptable' candidates for the nomination. South Carolina's political class recognised the importance of this alteration. One resolution passed by the legislature in response to the *Brown* decision urged the state's delegation to the 1956 Democratic National Convention seek restoration of the two-thirds rule.¹⁸

In a parallel development that particularly riled white southerners, the national Democratic Party realised that substantial African-American support could provide the margin of difference in tight urban races. Given Dixie's extraordinary fidelity to the Democratic ticket, national party strategists believed they could actively seek black votes whilst maintaining the 'Solid South.' In November 1947, White House advisor Clark Clifford assured President Truman that he could pursue an aggressive civil rights platform since the following year 'the South can be considered safely Democratic.' Whereas the South once represented a potent

¹⁷ Nancy Joan Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln: Black Politics in the Age of FDR* (Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 106; J. I. Hayes, *South Carolina and the New Deal* (University of South Carolina Press, 2001), pp. 158 & 165; Jody H. Graichen, 'Reinterpreting South Carolina History', *Proceedings of The South Carolina Historical Association* (2007), p. 15; 'Hollings says money downfall of politics', *News & Courier* (December 13, 2004).

¹⁸ Earl & Merle Black, *The Vital South*, pp. 80 & 91; Howard Quint, *Profile in Black and White* (Public Affairs Press, 1958), pp. 112-3.

force in internal party politicking, in the post-war era its exceptional racial and social conservatism became increasingly anomalous and marginalised. By 1956, southern delegates at the party's national convention could not even block the nomination onto the national ticket of Estes Kefauver, the Tennessee Senator despised as a regional traitor for his racial moderation. Twelve years later, James J. Kilpatrick bitterly described the 1968 party convention as an 'Appomattox for Southern Democrats,' and lamented that the region's ostracisation from the national party represented a 'watershed point in the decline and fall of the Southern empire.'¹⁹

Just as the Democratic Party began to operate without constant referral to the prejudices of white southerners, so another cornerstone of the Solid South was fragmenting. For half-a-century after granting racial segregation and voting restrictions constitutional legitimacy in the 1890s, the federal judiciary had lent tacit support to Jim Crow. Instructively, the legal team defending South Carolina in the *Brown v. Board* decision evinced considerable optimism that the Supreme Court would continue to protect Jim Crow. John W. Davis, the state's lead attorney, insisted that the right to maintain a segregated school system had been affirmed by the courts so many times over an eighty-year period that the matter should be considered settled. Despite the decade prior to *Brown* providing 'striking victories' in cases about voting rights in primary elections and teacher salary equalisation, Davis remained convinced that the Court would share his belief that education should remain 'properly within the discretion of state legislatures.' It was with considerable shock, therefore, that the white South received the justices' unanimous opinion on 'Black Monday', May 17 1954. South Carolina Governor and former Supreme Court Justice Jimmy Byrnes' first public response was to express surprise 'that the Court had reversed itself.' Having historically defended Dixie's peculiar racial customs, under Chief Justice Earl Warren the court dramatically expanded the solid steps it had taken in the 1930s and 1940s towards recognising African-American civil rights.²⁰

¹⁹ Harvard Sitkoff, 'Harry Truman and the Election of 1948', *Journal of Southern History* 37:4 (November 1971), p. 597; Earl & Merle Black, *The Vital South*, p. 104; James J. Kilpatrick, 'Convention is Appomattox for Southern Democrats', *The Augusta Chronicle* (c. 1968), in 'Political Parties, Presidential Election of 1968', Box 54, McNair Papers.

²⁰ Tinsley E. Yarbrough, *A Passion for Justice: J. Waties Waring and Civil Rights* (Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 64; Raymond Wolters, *Race and Education, 1954-2007* (University of Missouri Press, 2008), pp. 31-2; William Bagwell, *School Desegregation in the Carolinas: Two Case Studies* (University of South Carolina, 1972), p. 129; Sydnor Thompson, 'John W. Davis and His Role in the Public School Segregation Cases', *Washington and Lee Law*

As it overturned the key bases of the dominance exerted by white over black, so the Warren Court became viewed by the region's whites as a damnable aberration. Jason Sokol has illustrated how deeply many white southerners believed that a golden era of race relations was ending. This sentiment was acutely felt in South Carolina. In the wake of the Watts Riots, the *Charleston News and Courier* editorialised that the Palmetto State had managed to avoid similar bloodshed through 'the mutual understanding that develops among neighbours over many years of peaceful co-existence.' White South Carolinians cherished orderly race relations. James Felder, who in 1970 became one of the first black politicians elected to the state's General Assembly since Reconstruction, explained that 'South Carolina prides itself on being the gentleman.' By removing the legal basis for segregation and discrimination against African-Americans, the Supreme Court was widely believed to have disturbed a much-cherished, if highly illusory, equilibrium between white and black. Before Nixon arrived to campaign in Greenville, South Carolina, in October 1968, Strom Thurmond privately observed that the Supreme Court was 'particularly unpopular' within the state.²¹

South Carolina Goes In Search of Another Country

These ruptures with the national Democratic Party and the U.S. Supreme Court left the Palmetto State embittered and embattled. Eventually, its white voters would regroup under the banner of the Republican Party. In 1948, such a manoeuvre seemed futile. As Thurmond would correctly observe two decades later, the national parties' stands on race 'were so close that I felt the people had no choice.' Instead, segregationist southern whites accepted that they would have to undertake this battle on their own, without the support of either the national Democratic or Republican Party. Gradually, Senator Thurmond realised that even the Democratic Party was no longer an effective standard-bearer for Jim Crow. One Thurmond staff member

Review 52:5 (1996), p. 1685.

²¹ Jason Sokol, *There Goes My Everything* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), pp. 58-61; 'Let Us Stand Fast,' *News and Courier* (August 18, 1965); Sherm Unger to Richard Nixon, 'Greenville / Spartanburg, S.C. - Friday, October 4, 1968' (c. October 1968), '1968, Oct 4. Spartanburg, S.C.', Box 3, Campaign 1968 Collection - Appearance File (PPS 140), Nixon Library; Oral History with James Felder, interviewed by George King (May 28, 1992), Folder 25, Box 5, Subseries 1.2, Columbia, South Carolina, 1966-1992, 'Will the Circle Be Unbroken?' Papers, Emory, p. 11.

succinctly explained that, "Thurmond has not left the party, the party has abandoned him."²²

As court rulings and executive orders slowly eroded Jim Crow, South Carolina responded in two different ways. Inevitably, a wave of outrage and anger radicalised state politics. As governor, Strom Thurmond decisively shifted away from self-described 'liberal' policies towards what one biographer has described as the 'rancid residue of reaction.' More subtly, South Carolina adopted a 'school equalisation' programme that provided substantial investment into the state's dilapidated black schools to head off liberal accusations that segregation inevitably precipitated unequal social provision for African-American citizens. Whereas all southern state governments indulged in such programmes in recognition that 'a little more emphasis on the "equal" part of the separate but equal equation might be prudent if segregation was to be preserved,' South Carolina embarked on an exceptionally ambitious investment in minority education. By 1956, the equalisation programme meant that, in some areas of the state, black schools enjoyed better facilities than their white counterparts. Whilst demagogues like Thurmond ranted and raved, more accomplished political operators in the state sought to furtively forestall federal demands for racial equality. As Governor, Jimmy Byrnes advocated a three-percent sales tax to support such improvements. 'We should do it because it is right,' explained the former U.S. Supreme Court Justice and U.S. Secretary of State, before pointedly observing that, 'If any person wants an additional reason, I say it is wise.'²³

The divergent responses to federal intervention in civil rights exemplified a deeper schism within white South Carolina history: between aristocratic paternalism and a more vicious conception of white supremacy. The year before Rosa Parks' defiance of racial custom in Alabama precipitated the Montgomery Bus Boycott, Sarah Mae Flemming was 'struck and ejected' from public transport for the same offence. Whilst the Palmetto State undoubtedly had its share of violent reactionaries, racial paternalism also flourished amongst

²² Statement by Senator Strom Thurmond (February 8, 1968), 'Thurmond Discusses His Race For President in 1948', Box 30, Speeches, Thurmond Papers, Clemson; Banks, 'Strom Thurmond', p. 346.

²³ Banks, 'Strom Thurmond', p. 98; Marcia G. Synott, 'Desegregation in South Carolina', in *Looking South*, edited by Winfred B. Moore and Joseph F. Tripp (Greenwood Press, 1989), pp 51-9; Charles C. Bolton, 'Mississippi's School Equalization Program, 1945-1954', *Journal of Southern History* 66:4 (November 2000), p. 782; Howard Quint, *Profile in Black and White* (Public Affairs Press, 1958), p. 17; David Robertson, *Sly and Able* (W.W. Norton, 1994), p. 504.

wealthier white citizens. These two strains were not necessarily incompatible, and could exist in varying degrees within the same person. In Barnwell County during the mid-1960s, a prominent state politician had to be physically restrained from attacking an NAACP official leading a voter registration drive and street demonstration against local voter registration procedures. Interacting on paper with the activist, however, speaker of the state Senate Edgar Brown politely observed that, 'there are always a few white and colored people who put off registering to vote...The last thing we would want to do would be deprive anyone of the privilege of voting in Barnwell County.'²⁴

As Bryant Simon's nuanced work on demagogue Coleman Blease's appeal in the first decades of the twentieth century has demonstrated, the nexus between politics and race in South Carolina was decisively shaped by deep-seated issues of class. 'Before and after the Civil War,' Simon has explained, '*aristocrat* served as the pejorative term for wealthy lowcountry planters and their children who either wanted to restrict the suffrage rights of yeomen or entered into an unholy alliance with African-Americans to blunt the political powers of poor whites.' When Coleman Blease publicly boasted that the nation should expect more lynchings in South Carolina in the summer of 1930, he was challenged by *The Columbia Record*, the most prominent newspaper in the state; but supported by the extremist *Charleston News and Courier*. Although Blease remained popular amongst upstate mill workers, enough white voters agreed with the *Columbia Record* that Blease lost his effort to win renomination in the Democratic primary that same year, and never recovered politically.²⁵

Blease's howl of status anxiety was most effectively channelled by Ben Tillman in the late nineteenth-century. Tillman's politics fomented rebellion against a Bourbon elite that it accused of marrying a generous view of African-Americans with contemptuous distaste for the 'rougher' sort of whites. Perhaps

²⁴ Erin Z. Bass, 'Before Rosa Parks in Montgomery, there was Sarah Mae Flemming in Columbia', *Deep South Magazine* (7 July 2013); Jack Bass & Walter De Vries, *The Transformation of Southern Politics* (Meridian, 1977), p. 248; Edgar Brown to I. DeQuincey Newman (August 4, 1965), 'Newman, I. DeQuincey, Reports, 1965-1966', South Carolina, NAACP Papers, Rothermere American Institute, Oxford.

²⁵ Bryant Simon, 'The Appeal of Cole Blease of South Carolina', *Journal of Southern History*, 62:1 (February 1996), p. 78; Edwin D. Hoffman, 'The Genesis of the Modern Movement for Equal Rights in South Carolina, 1930-1939', *Journal of Negro History* 44:4 (October 1959), p. 350.

unsurprisingly, Strom Thurmond shared a common heritage with 'Pitchfork' Ben Tillman. Both had strong links with Edgefield County, an ultra-violent rural locale on the Georgia border, whilst Thurmond's father had forged a strong political alliance with Ben Tillman. Not only had he served as Tillman's campaign manager at one point, but he had even committed murder to defend Tillman's 'honor' in 1897. Despite eschewing his predecessor's penchant for racial violence by adopting a more buttoned-up image, Strom Thurmond tapped into Tillman's anti-establishmentarianism. During his 1944 gubernatorial campaign, Thurmond repeatedly attacked the 'Barnwell Ring,' a notoriously powerful group of low-county legislators; bullishly promising to 'open the eyes of South Carolina' to their secret misdeeds. Similarly, a decade later he became the first U.S. Senator ever elected by write-in vote, after campaigning against the undemocratic selection by the state Democratic Party of a replacement for the deceased primary nominee.²⁶

Understandably, South Carolina's establishment held Strom Thurmond's grandiose posturing in contempt. Future Governor John West bitterly described Thurmond's 1954 write-in campaign as '100 percent expediency. Strom has never been loyal to anyone but Strom.' The state bar association even passed a resolution censuring Thurmond after he campaigned for political office wearing his judge's robes. Other southern elites agreed that Thurmond's political style represented little more than cynical self-aggrandisement. After Senator Thurmond's infamous twenty-four hour filibuster against the 1957 Civil Rights bill, die-hard segregationist Herman Talmadge vented that 'in the long run [Thurmond's grandstanding actions] could wreak unspeakable havoc against my people.' Unlike Thurmond, the bulk of the southern caucus in Congress felt that such fire-and-brimstone would merely precipitate more federal intervention in Dixie's racial affairs. Sharing Talmadge's ire, other southern Senators raced across the floor to shake the Georgian's hand.²⁷

South Carolina Democrats and the Politics of Moderation

²⁶ Stephen Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman and the Reconstruction of White Supremacy* (University of North Carolina Press, 2000), pp. 110-155; Nadine Cohodas, *Strom Thurmond*, pp. 28-9; James Banks, 'Strom Thurmond', p. 72.

²⁷ Nadine Cohodas, *Strom Thurmond*, p. 264; Ted Riley Oral History, interviewed by John J. Duffy & George D. Terry (February 11, 1987), USCPC, p. 32; Robert Sherrill, *The Gothic Politics* (Grossman Publishers, 1968), p. 252.

Speaking privately to journalist John Osborne in 1966, McNair explained that, by returning Strom Thurmond to the U.S. Senate, a 'proud people' could justify their acceptance of federal funds. Robert Hickman, the Governor's press secretary, was even more effusive about Thurmond's role: labelling the Senator's diatribes against the federal government as 'very satisfying – a right handy arrangement' helping to legitimise the Governor's Office's pursuit of investment from Washington D.C. Reflecting on his interviews with a whole series of establishment figures in South Carolina, John Osborne concluded that Strom Thurmond provided 'a vent, an escape valve' for deep-seated resentment of federal intervention in state affairs that whites felt simultaneously necessary and unwelcome. In essence, his political impact was to resolve the paradox whereby white South Carolinians 'all love that Federal money – and then scream about Federal intervention.'²⁸

These interviews are made so compelling by the extent to which their subjects uniformly construed Thurmond's racially charged diatribes as necessary political cover to pursue federal largesse. This did not render Governor McNair a 'southern moderate.' Even the staunchest McNair advocate did not characterise him as a racial progressive, and correspondence from the period reveals a chief executive deeply uncomfortable with perceptions of such tolerance. After all, Governor McNair could also chastise the 'power-seeking Supreme Court,' and had personally spearheaded South Carolina's constitutional challenge of the 1965 Voting Rights Act in the U.S. Supreme Court. Nevertheless, such recalcitrance was really just window dressing designed to appeal to white segregationist voters. For the McNair Administration, these reactionary manoeuvres represented a useful means of dragging South Carolina out of its impoverished abyss without ceding too much ground on the race question to political opponents. They constituted political process, not die-hard policy commitments.²⁹

²⁸ John Osborne interviews with Robert McNair (January 18, 1966), Robert Hickman (January 17, 1966), Walter Harper (January 17, 1966) & Fred Sheheen (January 17, 1966): all in 'Research Material, South Carolina, 1965-66, n.d.', Box 85, Osborne Papers, LOC.

²⁹ Robert McNair Speech on Reapportionment, given at the Hampton Watermelon Festival (June 27, 1964), 'Speeches, 1964', Box 31, McNair Papers.

What marked McNair out as a Deep South Governor in the mid-1960s was his studied disinterest in the politics of race. After his elevation to the Governor's chair in 1965, this apparently colourless politician became increasingly concerned with ensuring that racial prejudice did not nullify economic development in the Palmetto State. On February 22, 1966, Governor McNair received an angry letter from a former colleague in the state legislature, Thomas R. Miller, claiming to be 'disappointed and distressed' with McNair's decision to desegregate state parks and not fight harder against school integration. According to Miller, these decisions would promote 'mongrelization,' 'violence,' and 'intermarriage.'³⁰

A fortnight later, McNair issued a careful defence of these decisions. Eschewing the racial issues underpinning Miller's remarks, McNair focused on the broader picture of the role these two facilities might play in the economic development of South Carolina. 'In this instance, everyone recognises that our parks are a valuable part of our outdoor recreational program and should be used in our tourist promotion plans for the future,' McNair firmly replied, 'In addition, we must educate our young people because of the demands of today and the future....Business, particularly industry, requires a high-school diploma and you can see that we are not turning out an adequate number [of qualified South Carolinians] to fill these jobs.' Unsurprisingly, the recipient did not respond: McNair had deliberately avoided the central focus of Miller's letter. As the Governor's handwriting on the original letter testified, it only required a 'Simple ans[we]r – Am only doing what I think is best for our state.' In all likelihood, an unimpressed Miller switched his attention to Senator Strom Thurmond, with whom he corresponded on racial matters.³¹

Thomas Miller and Strom Thurmond held a wildly divergent political philosophy to Robert McNair. Thurmond acknowledged the point in a personal letter to McNair a few years later, when he observed that 'my approach is somewhat different from yours.' This was a polite understatement. Whilst Thurmond repeatedly invoked the Civil War to marshal electoral support, McNair's vision for his governorship was 'to quit commemorating the activities and events of the war we'd lost and start thinking about the one we'd

³⁰ Thomas Miller to Robert McNair (February 22, 1966), 'General, 1965-1966', Box 30, McNair Papers,

³¹ Robert McNair to Thomas Miller (March 8, 1966), General, 1965-1966', Box 30, McNair Papers; Thomas Miller to Strom Thurmond (May 14, 1963), 'Republican Party Misc', Box 1, General, Republican Party of South Carolina Papers, USCPC.

won.' This meant abandoning sectionalism to seek financial support and programmatic aid from Washington D.C. Addressing a 'Children of the Confederacy' convention in August 1966, Gov. McNair boldly stated that, 'we must never forget that our natural inclination to preserve the best of the past can never be allowed to overshadow our obligations to the present and future.' Whilst paying lip-service to South Carolina's heritage, McNair eagerly siphoned every available federal dollar: creating a State Planning and Grants Division within his executive office, and capitalising on a warm relationship with President Lyndon Johnson to secure additional patronage. Indeed, McNair's politics resembled those of Johnson to such a striking degree that one newspaper correspondent labelled him 'A Soft-Sell LBJ.'³²

Robert McNair had grown up in a rural South profoundly shaped by the New Deal. Looking back at the 1930's in South Carolina, McNair recalled that President Franklin Roosevelt's programs provided electricity, paved roads, and drained swamps to create fertile land. Three decades later, Governor McNair was unwilling to reject such vital assistance merely to sate the lust of those who, in the evocative words of *Harper's Weekly*, 'owed nightly prayer to William Tecumseh Sherman - his flames set them free to build mansions of glory every afternoon.' As a cool-headed pragmatist, McNair instead publicly insisted that, 'as long as South Carolina remains in the category of low income states, we need federal assistance.' This blunt statement of an uncomfortable reality was characteristic of a politician who tended to eschew tub-thumping rhetoric for plain speaking. As George Wallace observed of Governor McNair, 'he's one of them *nice* fellas, you know, he don't go in for [racist] talk.'³³

Whilst Strom Thurmond declared war on the national Democratic Party and the federal judiciary, Robert

³² Strom Thurmond to Robert McNair (January 30, 1970), 'Desegregation, Public Schools, General, 1970, Notes', Box 31, McNair Papers; Robert McNair Oral History (November 9, 1982), 1/11/11, p. 19; 'Excerpts from remarks by Governor Robert E. McNair to Children of the Confederacy Convention' (August 9, 1966), 'R.E. McNair, Speeches, 1966, August', Box 89, McNair Papers; Jack Bass, 'McNair's Honeymoon May Be Nearing An End', *Charlotte Observer* (January 7, 1967), William E. Mahoney, 'New State Division On Grants Revealed', *Columbia Record* (April 3, 1967) & Douglas Mauldin, 'For Closer Ties With Uncle Sam', *Greenville News* (c. April 1967): all in 'General, 1967', Box 106, McNair Papers; Robert McNair Oral History (April 16, 1982), 1/11/1, pp. 5-6; Philip G. Grose, 'Robert McNair and Lyndon Johnson: The Heritage of the New Deal', *The Proceedings of The South Carolina Historical Association* (2009), p. 13.

³³ William Francis Guess, 'South Carolina's Incurable Aristocrats,' *Harper's Magazine* (February 1957), p. 45; Marshall Frady, *Wallace* (Meridian Books, 1976), p. 9.

McNair sought to fashion a dynamic accommodation between the emerging national consensus against Jim Crow and his white constituents' commitment to a rigid racial hierarchy. In the years after the *Brown* decision, the vast majority of South Carolina politicians tended towards Thurmond's conception of resistance over conciliation. In 1956, for example, one academic recorded that, 'the state legislature enacted anti-integration and anti-NAACP proposals at almost a mass production rate. If no pertinent laws could be enacted, the legislators adopted, usually unanimously, resolutions to express their opinion on a particular phase of the integration controversy.' Barely a single dissenting voice was to be heard. *The Florence Morning News*, the most moderate newspaper in the state, observed that such bellicose rhetoric had 'replaced "home, mother, God, and country" in South Carolina political circles.'³⁴

By 1963, the state's political establishment had decisively shifted towards the moderation espoused by McNair, and rejected Thurmond's bellicose brand of reactionary politics. Writing about South Carolina in the civil rights era, historian John G. Sproat described this new political economy as a 'conspiracy of peace.' Sproat borrowed the term from Edgar Brown, veteran leader of the state senate who perhaps more than anyone was the ultimate establishment insider in South Carolina politics at mid-century. The term 'conspiracy of peace' accurately describes the manner in which a social elite facilitated the end of Jim Crow without the consent, or sometimes even knowledge, of the white community. Why did South Carolina's elite abandon such deeply-held racial beliefs without a fight? Sproat's conclusions were compelling: a mixture of 'economic expedience, political realism, traditions of deference and paternalism, the basic conservatism of both blacks and whites in the state – all of these factors came together in the 1960s to direct South Carolina way from massive resistance to peaceful accommodation.' In the trade-off between stability and segregation, a critical mass of influential civic leaders chose McNair's brand of cautious moderation than the short-termist path offered by Thurmond.³⁵

³⁴ Howard Quint, *Profile in Black and White*, pp. 104 & 111.

³⁵ John G. Sproat, 'Firm Flexibility: Perspectives on Desegregation in South Carolina,' in *New Perspectives on Race and Slavery in America*, edited by Robert H. Abzug & Stephen E. Maizlish (University of Kentucky Press, 1986), pp. 179-80, quote at p. 180.

1963 – The Year of Decision

In November 1962, *New York Times* journalist James Reston wrote a perceptive piece on electoral politics in the Palmetto State. 'The political paradox of South Carolina', concluded Reston, 'is that it wants to enjoy the power of the Democratic party without supporting it; it wants to support the objectives of Gov. Ross Barnett in Mississippi without suffering the consequences, and it would like to benefit from Federal contracts while opposing the cost of Federal programs or meeting Federal standards of equal employment for the Negroes.' This 'paradox' could not last forever. Politicians would soon have to choose between sensationalist, reckless politicking and addressing the pressing realities elucidated by Reston.³⁶

The watershed arrived in January 1963, when South Carolina faced an imminent federal court order mandating the end of segregation in education. With just a few weeks left in office, Governor Ernest Hollings' advisers insisted that he delegate the matter to Donald Russell, incoming governor and a fierce political rival. By that point, however, Hollings had already decided 'to enforce the law, it was not going to be enforced by rednecks [or] members of the Klan.' This represented a somewhat recent development in Hollings' politics. When the mayor of Columbia had suggested the establishment of a biracial committee to deal with the problem of integration in 1962, Hollings issued a tongue-lashing and treated him 'like a dog.' By early 1963, though, Governor Hollings realised that such a gamble was necessary.³⁷

Accordingly, Hollings convened a joint session of the General Assembly. One attendee recalled that, 'It was very tense. If Hollings had said, "Go to war," the legislature would have done that. They had all sorts of ideas of massive resistance.' This was no exaggeration. A year earlier, Representative A.W. Bethea of Dillon County ran for governor on a die-hard segregationist platform: insisting that if desegregation was ordered by a federal court under a Bethea administration he would close the doors 'so tight you wouldn't be able to get a

³⁶ James Reston, 'How They Fight Elections in South Carolina', *New York Times* (October 19, 1962)

³⁷ Oral History with Harry Walker, interviewed by Herbert Hartsook (January 27, 1999), South Carolina Political Collections Oral History Project, University of South Carolina Political Collections (USCPC), p. 9: Accessed at <http://library.sc.edu/scpc/oralhist> on August 23, 2011; Bradley Scott Sauls, 'Desegregation in Columbia, South Carolina, 1960-1963' (Master's Thesis, University of South Carolina, 1997), p. 50.

crow bar in.' Such white supremacist grandstanding commanded support in the General Assembly. A few years earlier, the legislature had considered a bill providing that if any state college or university was forced under court order to admit a black student then that institution would close, along with the black college at Orangeburg. Only three state senators opposed the bill, and one was defeated at the next election. The corollary provision mandating closure of the flagship African-American institute of higher education suggested that politicians knew exactly whom to blame and punish in the event of the colour line being breached.³⁸

Addressing the state legislature in his farewell address as Governor on January 9, 1963, Hollings defied such visceral passions. 'As we meet, South Carolina is running out of courts. If and when every legal remedy has been exhausted, this General Assembly must make clear South Carolina's choice, a government of laws rather than a government of men,' Governor Hollings stated clearly, in the language of reason that his successor Robert McNair would echo in future years, 'This should be done with dignity. It must be done with law and order.' Departing from the text to indulge his southern sense of theatricality, Hollings stared at Chief Pete Strom of the State Law Enforcement Division (SLED). 'Pete, you make damned sure nothing happens up there,' demanded the Governor. The speech's audacity astounded onlookers. One close Hollings ally recalled the moment as 'a turning point, and it was a stupid political move for the immediate situation...It was really one of the most courageous and one of the most dramatic things I've seen in public life.' In an era when the imagination of the white South had run wild with dreams of vainglorious defiance, Fritz Hollings carefully outlined an alternative vision of a peaceable future. At the end, Governor Hollings received an ovation. One legislative correspondent observed with surprise that his audience were not simply persuaded; 'they were *impressed*.'³⁹

Significantly, Hollings' gambit won the approval of state senator Marion Gressette, who had spearheaded the

³⁸ Oral History with John West, interviewed by Herbert Hartsook (February 1, 1996), USCPC Oral History Project, pp. 26-7; Kristie Porter, 'The Legal Committee of the South Carolina NAACP' (Honors Thesis, South Carolina College, 1990), pp. 20-1.

³⁹ Address by Ernest Hollings (January 9, 1963), 'Fritz Hollings: In His Own Words', USCPC: Accessed at <http://library.sc.edu/digital/collections/hollings.html> on January 25, 2012; Oral History with John West, pp. 26-7; George McMillan, 'Integration with Dignity,' *Saturday Evening Post* (March 16, 1963), p. 13.

legislature's campaign against *Brown*. As chairman of the South Carolina School Committee, more commonly known as the Gressette Committee, the senator instituted repeal of the state's compulsory attendance law. For half-a-decade after the *Brown* decision, the Gressette Committee was 'in almost continuous session...for almost two years [it] met as often as two or three times a month for as much as two days at a time.' Gressette understood that the committee's purpose was to maintain racially separate schools for as long as practically possible. When one state legislator pointed out a legal flaw in a plan to circumvent any potential desegregation order, 'Marion [Gressette] jumped up and yelled, "My God Almighty, you'll just ruin the whole situation. You're going to let them get their foot in the door, and once they get their foot in the door, one of the doors will be gone.' One journalist concluded that 'it was almost solely their confidence in Gressette that caused groups like the Citizens Councils to stay dormant.'⁴⁰

Despite his commitment to the cause of segregated schools, Senator Gressette acceded to Governor Hollings' plea for compliance. In an emotional speech on the state senate floor, Gressette rather self-servingly observed that, 'I have preached peace and good will too long to change my thinking.' Instead of berating the veteran senator as a hypocritical turncoat, his colleagues offered up a standing ovation. A critical mass of elite white South Carolina mirrored this response. Civic leaders followed Hollings' lead in smoothing the way for Jim Crow's demise. The most prominent example was Harvey Gantt's arrival at Clemson, which was applauded by both President John Kennedy and his Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights.⁴¹

This landmark event involved 'probably the most complete and carefully thought-out [plan] ever drawn up in the United States to meet the threat of racial violence.' Detention centres were set aside capable of detaining large numbers of troublemakers, whilst a SLED aircraft patrolled the sky and police photographers captured on-the-ground footage; all co-ordinated by a central command post. The state spent \$27,000 on food and lodging for law enforcement officials on duty during Gantt's registration, and a further \$2,000 more to maintain additional security until the end of the academic year. Describing the process as 'integration with

⁴⁰ 'Interim Report of South Carolina School Committee' (South Carolina School Committee, December 14, 1955 & March 31, 1959), South Caroliniana Library Collections; Oral History with Ted Riley, p. 30.

⁴¹ Walter Edgar, *South Carolina in the Modern Age* (University of South Carolina Press, 1992), p. 106.

dignity,' *Saturday Evening Post* journalist George McMillan unreservedly praised the contribution of South Carolina's 'responsible people, its leadership group, its "power structure."' McMillan was vague precisely because the group operated in the shadows of South Carolina public life. His article was dominated by off-the-record briefings, and yet still remains the best account of the events leading up to Clemson's peaceful integration.⁴²

What is clear is that the 'power structure' was disproportionately dominated by business elites keen that their investments were not sacrificed on the altar of Jim Crow. A seminal moment in this chain of events arrived in the summer of 1961. In the unlikely setting of the low-country Hampton Watermelon Festival, Charles Daniel, a wealthy textile owner with influential connections within the state, baldly declared that 'the desegregation issue cannot continue to be hidden behind the door.' Robert McNair later recalled that Daniel's basic reasoning was that 'it's good business as well as good politics to do this.' Since no mention was made of race or morality, even right-wing ideologues could buy into Daniel's arguments. For example, Roger Milliken, an ultraconservative upstate textile magnate who financially underwrote the state Republican party, offered a constructive contribution to the process of dismantling Jim Crow education. As a trustee of upstate Wofford College, Milliken volunteered to make up any losses incurred by the college if its acceptance of black students alienated donors. As a result, Wofford became one of the first historically-white independent colleges in the South to admit African-Americans in the fall of 1964.⁴³

State politicians desperate to maintain segregation at any cost responded angrily to this shadowy manoeuvring. A few months after Harvey Gantt broke the colour line in South Carolina education, one legislator angrily wrote of 'the Clemson stench,' and observed that 'our people were stunned, they just couldn't grasp the fact that they had been sold down the river by a bunch of politicians and businessmen.' Whilst 'our people' was not necessarily indicative of a general mentality, the 'conspiracy of peace' was undoubtedly an elitist conceit designed to minimise the impact of popular reaction against racial change.

⁴² Maxie Myron Cox, '1963 – The Year of Decision: Desegregation in South Carolina' (PhD Thesis, University of South Carolina, 1996), pp. 39, 61 & 64; George McMillan, 'Integration with Dignity,' pp. 9 & 13.

⁴³ Timothy Williams, 'Roger Milliken, Conservative Tycoon, Dies at 95', *New York Times* (December 31, 2010).

Dissent was swiftly stifled. When A.W. Bethea addressed the legislature 'with tears in his eyes' in bitter opposition to the desegregation of Clemson, the House of Representatives made the rare manoeuvre of moving into executive session to limit media coverage of the speech.⁴⁴

The approach was not novel in conception, only the scale of its ambition. In September 1962, veteran civil rights activist John McCray observed that Columbia's city fathers had used a similar formula since the end of World War Two, since 'it is harder to undo something that has been and is being done, than to stop it before it begins.' Obsessed with promoting itself as 'a peaceful, progressive community,' throughout the 1950s and 1960s Columbia desperately sought *Look* magazine's All-America City Award. The civil rights movement constituted a hurdle to be surmounted, not fought. Desegregation of the city's lunch counters was a paradigmatic example. On August 21, 1962, Kress, Walgreen's, Woolworth's and other downtown lunch counters voluntarily served blacks with little white protest or complaint. At the insistence of Mayor Lester Bates, the city's newspaper *The State* did not mention the incident for two days; and then it was buried on the back pages amidst uncontroversial news about airline service in the area and the end of summer session at a local college. The news blackout was so intense that a local radio station initially had to stonewall when national reports of the event triggered a deluge of telephone calls. Whilst white response to the news was less intense than expected, reservations were expressed about the propriety of such secretive action. A group of 'deeply concerned Columbians' purchased an advert in *The State* entitled 'Is the Curtain Drawn on Our News?', whilst Charleston's *News and Courier* insisted that similar episodes of racial desegregation 'ought not to become a pattern in South Carolina without full knowledge and consent of the people.'⁴⁵

Despite such protestations, this 'conspiracy of peace' did become the pattern in South Carolina. Four years later, no less a figure than NAACP Executive Secretary Roy Wilkins commended the state's steady progress.

'Starting from much further back in tradition,' Wilkins wrote in an op-ed newspaper piece, 'it already has

⁴⁴ John G. Sproat, 'Firm Flexibility', pp. 179-80; Paul S. Lofton Jr., 'Calm and Exemplary', in *Southern Businessmen and Desegregation*, edited by Elizabeth Jacoway & David R. Colburn (Louisiana State University Press, 1982), pp. 70-1; Thomas Miller to Strom Thurmond (May 14, 1963); Maxie Myron Cox, '1963 – The Year of Decision', p. 30.

⁴⁵ Sauls, 'Desegregation in Columbia, South Carolina', pp. 55-61; Michael Sponhur & Dawn Hinshaw, "'Secret' Plan helped keep the peace', *The State* (February 1, 1994), in 'Projects, Cola. Community Relations Council, Clippings', Box 1, Lester Bates Papers, USCPC.

caught and passed many a Northern community.' Interviewed two decades later, one African-American archivist recalled that Columbia survived the turbulent 1960s with little incident, explaining that 'nothing really happened. No attacks were made. No blood was shed, that I know of.' For historian Tony Badger, this development represented little more than the righting of an egregious wrong. Addressing a civil rights conference in South Carolina that included former Governors Hollings and West in its audience, Badger pointedly observed, 'it is to their credit that, having got to the brink, they looked into the abyss and turned round.'⁴⁶

More than Morals: The Hidden Value of A Moderate Approach

Whilst Badger's conclusion was broadly accurate, this decision was far more complex than a simple moral equation. Political moderation in response to racial change presented a triangle of advantage that included federal dollars, stable social order, and economic development. The financial cost of segregation must not be underestimated. In 1961, the University of South Carolina's lilywhite law school cost the state \$17-an-hour, whereas the figure was \$100-an-hour for the African-American law school mandated by judicial decree at Orangeburg. The increasingly stringent anti-discrimination regulations attached to federal money represented an even greater problem. In 1957, Clemson College rejected a U.S. Atomic Energy Commission grant worth \$350,000 on the basis that it would have to sign a contract promising non-discrimination in the 'education and training project' involved.⁴⁷

Segregation undoubtedly had its price. In later years, Robert McNair described the shift towards racial moderation in South Carolina as principally motivated by pursuit of 'the federal dollar.' McNair's recollections are substantiated by contemporary evidence. In his 1964-1965 annual report, South Carolina Superintendent Jesse T. Anderson referred to desegregation as 'progress' on the basis that it secured the flow

⁴⁶ Robert McNair Oral History (November 15, 1982), 1/11/12, p. 1; Oral History with Minnie W. Johnson, interviewed by Worth Long (June 30, 1983), Folder 1, Box 6, Subseries 1.2, Columbia, South Carolina, 1966-1992, 'Will the Circle Be Unbroken?' Papers, Emory, p. 28; Badger, *New Deal / New South*, p. 143.

⁴⁷ Maxie Myron Cox, '1963 – The Year of Decision', p. 65; Jerome V. Reel, *The High Seminary* (Clemson University Digital Press, 2011), pp. 486-9.

of federal money. Passage of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act created an even greater financial incentive to comply with federal regulations. When Clarendon County desegregated in September 1965, it received \$216,000 from Washington: nearly one-third of its total annual budget. By the school year 1965-1966, approximately one-fifth of the state's funding for primary and secondary education was provided by the federal government, more than twice the national average. For local school districts, non-compliance increasingly represented financial disaster. In December 1966, an investigation by the Governor's Office into the impact of federal fund terminations or deferrals demonstrated that, to adequately replace lost revenue, the nineteen South Carolina school districts in non-compliance with the 1964 Civil Rights Act would need to raise property taxes by up to 11.5 percentage points.⁴⁸

South Carolina Republicans offered up no viable alternative to the simple proposition that Jim Crow deprived schools of invaluable federal funding. Even the prospect of such investment from Washington D.C. horrified Thurmond. One of the many programs he voted against was the School Assistance Act of 1961, which provided \$2.5 billion in grants for school construction and teacher salaries. Thurmond bluntly advised a group of upstate educators seeking money from Washington D.C., 'You school people don't know what you're doing. You don't need federal money. If you get federal money, the federal people are going to tell you how to run your school.'⁴⁹

Like Thurmond, other Republicans refused to acknowledge the necessity of federal dollars to improve state education, and ignored statistics showing that South Carolina relied on the federal government for 17.3 percent of its budget for primary and secondary public education: a figure that was double the national average. In the gubernatorial election of 1966, former Gressette Committee member Joe Rogers ran against McNair proposing that 'the state replace any money lost by a school district by reason of its failure to comply

⁴⁸ John White, 'Managed Compliance' (PhD Dissertation, University of Florida, 2006), p. 384; Anne Lufkin Kelsey, 'At Their Own Deliberate Speed' (Master's Thesis, Clemson University, 2010), p. 27; Grose, *South Carolina at the Brink*, pp 118-9; Untitled table demonstrating cost of deferral to South Carolinian school districts (c December 1966), 'Desegregation, Public Schools, General, 1966', Box 30, McNair Papers.

⁴⁹ Keith M. Finley, 'Southern Opposition to Civil Rights' (PhD Thesis, Louisiana State University, 2003), p. 278; Oral History with Thurman Anderson, interviewed by Catherine Lewis & Randall Wells (c. May 1991), Horry County Oral History Project, p. 24.

with federal demands.' Given that every southern school board feared appearing weaker than its neighbours on segregation, Rogers' plan would essentially have mandated that federal funds to education be progressively replaced by state money; in a state that already provided an unusually high proportion of funding to school districts compared with the localities as a result of historically-low *ad valorem* taxes. This represented bad governance but good politics: few white South Carolinians would have disagreed with the chairman of the board of Summerville School District No. 2, who complained in July 1966 that HEW bureaucrats enforcing anti-discrimination regulations indulged in 'Gestapo tactics' and 'torture' of well-meaning education officials.⁵⁰

In contrast with Rogers' approach, during that year's gubernatorial campaign McNair boldly insisted that, 'those who believe that firing off telegrams to Washington every day and stamping "automatic reject" on anything that involves federal-state cooperation make the measure of a good governor -- They just don't want Bob McNair.' This was not just empty campaign rhetoric. In his first years in the Governor's Office, McNair developed a close working relationship with the Department of Health, Education & Welfare (HEW); particularly with its south-eastern branch in Atlanta, and that office's chief, William J. Page. In correspondence between the two, Page described South Carolina as 'a State that is making a conscientious and productive effort' to liaise effectively with HEW, principally due to McNair's 'excellent leadership.'⁵¹

The results were impressive. Contrary to standard practice, between February 1967 and March 1968 HEW officials twice conducted administrative hearings for South Carolina school districts within the state itself rather than Washington D.C.. This ensured that McNair could score political points by publicly observing that 'federal officials [are] likely to get a better understanding of local problems when they are brought closer to them.' Besides demonstrating to a sceptical white audience that a good relationship with HEW might

⁵⁰ Philip G. Grose, *South Carolina at the Brink*, pp. 118-9; Untitled Speech beginning 'The State of South Carolina, with several other states' (c. 1966), 'Campaigns, Gubernatorial, 1966: Speeches', Box 1, Joe Rogers Papers, USCPC; W. Marshall Bailey to Robert McNair (July 20, 1966), 'Health, Education and Welfare, Dept of, General, 1966', Box 85, McNair Papers.

⁵¹ 'Remarks by Robert E. McNair for Campaign Rally in Aiken' (October 6, 1966), 'Speeches, 1966, October', Box 89, McNair Papers; William Page to Robert McNair (October 14, 1966), 'Health, Education and Welfare, Dept of, General, 1966'.

positively affect federal decisions about Jim Crow schools, such close cooperation ensured a bountiful flow of federal resources into the Palmetto State. As William Page excitedly observed to McNair, 'the opportunities for program development in South Carolina are almost limitless.'⁵²

Such financial support was intrinsic to McNair's plans for improving public services, since the state legislature prided itself on a reputation for supreme fiscal conservatism. Edgar Brown and Sol Blatt, two veteran guardians of the purse, embodied this mentality: 'act[ing] as though the Maker personally adds a gold star to their charts each time they bring South Carolina through with another balanced budget. No matter that the state ranks near the bottom of almost every scale of economic and social health; it has been limping along with change in its pocket.' Constrained by such miserliness, putative reformers turned to Washington for financial assistance.⁵³

Whilst the necessity of federal funding gradually seeped into the consciousness of thoughtful South Carolina politicians, widespread concern about the consequences of racially-motivated social disorder could be traced to a single event. On September 30, 1962, the University of Mississippi bore witness to 'a maelstrom of savagery and hatred' as white hooligans rioted against desegregation. By the time peace was restored, two men lay dead, hundreds of U.S. Marshalls were injured, and 200 rioters had been arrested. At the heart of the event lay Governor Ross Barnett, who was fighting desperately to prevent racial integration before the end of his term in office. A day earlier, Barnett had walked onto the field at an Ole Miss football game to vaingloriously announce, 'I love Mississippi, I love her people, our customs. I love and respect our heritage.' A crowd swathed in Confederate flags roared approval. As Barnett's moderate predecessor, James P. Coleman, later lamented, the Governor 'kept throwing a match to every gasoline barrel he could find until we had a magnificent explosion.'⁵⁴

⁵² William Page to Robert McNair (January 25, 1967), 'Health, Education and Welfare, Dept of, General, 1967' & 'News Release from the Office of Governor Robert E. McNair' (Thursday, February 9, 1967), 'Health, Education and Welfare, Dept of, General, 1967': all in Box 85, McNair Papers.

⁵³ Roger M. Williams, 'Two Old Men', *South Today* (April 1971), p. 5.

⁵⁴ Charles W. Eagles, *The Price of Defiance* (University of North Carolina Press), p 340; Nadine Cohodas, 'James Meredith and the Integration of Ole Miss', *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 16 (Summer 1997), pp. 121-2; Oral

Such violence horrified Palmetto State elites who had previously occupied a naïve netherworld in which political demagoguery produced no direct social consequences. Thomas F. Jones, President of the University of South Carolina, reported that 'the crisis at "Ole Miss" has had a very sobering influence on South Carolinians.' When newspapers demanded whether Governor Hollings would be willing to go to jail to preserve Jim Crow, he stylishly retorted that 'if it works out like Mississippi, jail would certainly be the safest place.' Polled by telephone, seventy prominent South Carolinian businessmen unanimously approved a statement insisting on maintaining 'law and order' at Clemson regardless of circumstance. Decades later, Robert McNair directly related Barnett's incendiary actions to the development of moderation in South Carolina. 'It was awfully good to be able to go out to the football stadium and have everybody stand and cheer and wave the flag for you when you said we were still going to fight until the last, ' McNair wryly observed, 'but we knew we couldn't win.'⁵⁵

The horror of Ole Miss shattered such illusions to a degree that previous racial violence had not. After Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus recklessly precipitated a profound racial crisis at Little Rock in 1957, South Carolina politicians applauded his reckless stand. Governor Timmerman sent a telegram of encouragement, and the state's senior Senator Olin Johnston bullishly suggested that, if placed in Faubus' position, 'I'd proclaim a state of insurrection down there, and call out the state militia, and then I'd find out who's going to run things in my state!' By sharp contrast, in 1962 Governor Ernest Hollings turned down an invitation to lead a motorcade to Mississippi as a visible means of supporting Governor Barnett's stand. Speaking to Barnett on the telephone, Hollings warned that 'You're talking wild talk. We [could] get a lot of people killed that way.' Instead of soaking up white supremacist adulation, Hollings dispatched a delegation of SLED personnel to Oxford with the instruction that 'we're not going to make those mistakes.' Writing in

History with James P. Coleman, interviewed by John Egerton (September 5, 1990), Interview A-0338, Oral Histories of the American South, University of North Carolina: accessed at <http://docsouth.unc.edu> on January 24, 2012.

⁵⁵ Thomas F. Jones to Alma L. Campbell (November 8, 1962), reproduced in Carolyn Click, 'USC in '63: Black students step onto campus, into history', *The State* (August 17, 2013), Accessed at <http://www.thestate.com/2013/08/17/2926187/usc-in-63-black-students-step.html#storylink=cpy> on August 19, 2013; George McMillan, 'Integration with Dignity', pp. 11 & 13; Oral History with Robert McNair, (November 9, 1982) 1/11/11, p. 15.

the *Pittsburgh Courier*, veteran civil rights activist and educator Benjamin Mays observed that, 'Mississippi had no responsible leadership. South Carolina has. I salute my native state.'⁵⁶

As a prototypical New South politician, Governor Hollings knew that such responsibility represented good business as well as decent governance. In the wake of the rioting at Ole Miss, James Reston of *The New York Times* pointedly observed that Hollings was not 'in Columbia SC weeping for Governor Ross Barnett of Mississippi. He is in Milan, Italy, this week talking over the possibilities of trade between the state of South Carolina and the European Common Market.' As Reston explained, in the Palmetto State 'laws, morals, and business' were intertwined. Indeed, the Ole Miss incident became a powerful rhetorical tool in the armoury of moderate white South Carolinians seeking to persuade recalcitrant elites to 'do the right thing.' In 1959, Governor Hollings observed that the state's competitors 'are daily crying...[that] there was no use to locate in South Carolina; that due to segregation problems, there would be violence.' If events at Ole Miss were repeated in the Palmetto State, such briefings would accrue substantial credence. Economic boosters constantly reiterated the point. Confronting state senator Gressette about the implications of violence at Clemson, college president Robert Edwards observed of a proposed multi-million dollar development in Gressette's home constituency that 'if there's a ruckus at Clemson those people won't even plant scrub oak in Calhoun County.'⁵⁷

Economic development incentivised social harmony. Ever since Governor Jimmy Byrnes had persuaded Du Pont to lay down roots in South Carolina in the early 1950s, the state had desperately sought outside investment. It had achieved substantial success, with an average of 7,400 new jobs created in the state each year during the 1950s. Under the Hollings Administration, over \$850 million was invested in industrial construction in South Carolina. As the state's Council on Human Relations shrewdly observed, 'neither

⁵⁶ Howard Quint, *Profile in Black and White*, p. 161; Stetson Kennedy, *Jim Crow Guide to the U.S.A.* (Larence & Wishart, 1959), p. 102;); Maxie Myron Cox, '1963 – The Year of Decision', p. 19; Harry Walker Oral History, p. 14; J.P. Strom Oral History, pp. 26-7; M. Ron Cox, 'Integration with [Relative] Dignity', in *Towards the Meeting of the Waters*, edited by Winfred B. Moore & Orville Vernon Burton (University of South Carolina Press, 2008), p. 282.

⁵⁷ James Reston, 'Laws, Morals and Business in South Carolina', *New York Times* (October 17, 1962); Grose, *South Carolina at the Brink*, p. 113; Phillip G. Mullinnix, 'Potential Conflict: The Confluence of Race and Economics during the Administration of Ernest "Fritz" Hollings, 1959-1963' (Master's Thesis, Clemson University, 2011), pp. 75-6; McMillan, 'Integration with Dignity', p. 13.

businessmen nor workers wanted any racial violence to interfere with this progress.' At the time of the Ole Miss crisis, one official from the South Carolina development board apprehensively observed that the organisation 'might as well fold up its tent and go to bed' should a repeat occur in the state. Such sentiment certainly was a long distance away from the mentality of legislation passed by the General Assembly several decades earlier, which mandated that any textile company violating Jim Crow social norms in South Carolina could be privately prosecuted; and the responsible official fined or sentenced to thirty-days hard labour as punishment.⁵⁸

The Path Not Taken: Strom Thurmond, the GOP and the Reality of Defiance

Economic growth, civic boosterism, and law-and-order were all precepts that Richard Nixon's brand of centrist Republicanism lauded and encouraged. During the 1960 presidential campaign, Nixon received his most fervent reception in Atlanta, Georgia: a bastion of New South ideals that congratulated itself as 'the city too busy to hate.' Addressing the throng of 150,000 who 'yipped, yodeled, whistled and shrieked' in response, Nixon admitted that 'the civil rights issue...is a difficult issue,' but insisted that he 'congratulate those, including the mayor of this city, who had been dealing with this difficult issue and making progress on it.' It is not difficult to imagine Richard Nixon taking a similar view about South Carolina's 'conspiracy of peace'.⁵⁹

Strom Thurmond rejected such moderation outright. In an April 1968 speech he dismissed its adherents as a 'Turncoat School' whose membership 'want to jettison the past as unwanted baggage and get down to the business of making a lot of money.' In contrast to the South Carolina political establishment, Strom Thurmond's response to the Clemson crisis was hostile. Just as Thurmond had called for the Warren Court to be impeached after the *Brown* decision, so he now denigrated the Fourth Circuit's decision to desegregate his

⁵⁸ Oral History with Walter Harper, interviewed by Herbert Hartsook (September 12, 1997), p. 26; Cox, '1963 – The Year of Decision', p. 10 at fn 19; Bagwell, *School Desegregation in the Carolinas*, p. 168; Kennedy, *Jim Crow Guide*, p. 120.

⁵⁹ Speech of Vice President Richard Nixon in Atlanta, Georgia (August 26, 1960) *The American Presidency Project*, Accessed at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=25463#axzz1zllM6F1F> on July 5, 2012; Theodore H. White, *The Making of the President 1960* (Harper Collins, 2009), p. 271.

alma mater as bearing 'slight regard for objectivity, justice, and the law.' Senator Thurmond would not repeat the antics of a demagogue like Governor Barnett, but neither would he come out on the side of law-and-order in the face of an unpopular judicial decree.⁶⁰

Whilst such antediluvian rhetoric inevitably sated Thurmond's passion for re-election, it also minimised the Senator's influence on Capitol Hill. Immersed in his own hard-line political reputation back home, Thurmond offered scant reward for colleagues seeking fertile compromise. This culture permeated Senator Thurmond's whole operation in Washington D.C. When asked if he worked for the government, one Thurmond staffer replied instructively, 'No, I work against the government.' Shortly afterwards, his boss was named the 'least effective' member of Congress in two surveys of Capitol Hill journalists and fellow politicians.⁶¹

In 1968, journalist Robert Sherrill wrote accurately that Strom Thurmond's 'complete incomprehension of the Deep South's new techniques for resisting change has made him the clown of the Senate.' The summer of that year, Strom Thurmond was the only U.S. Senator to oppose the confirmation of Wilbur Cohen as HEW Secretary. Even the firebreathing Mississippi Senators James Eastland and John Stennis refused to go that far. Thurmond's futile crusades extended to showing pornography to fellow Senate Judiciary Committee members as a means of discrediting Abe Fortas' candidacy for Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, which provided newspaper cartoonists with ample material to skewer the South Carolina Senator as an anachronistic irrelevance. A *Washington Post* cartoon had 'Obscenator' Thurmond in a doorway hissing, 'Want to see some dirty pictures?'⁶²

Over the course of eighteen months, Thurmond's political fortunes altered dramatically. By November 1969, one newspaper cartoonist dubbed the White House, 'Uncle Strom's Cabin.' The emerging southern Republican Party played a critical role in the Senator's metamorphosis from regional curiosity into the

⁶⁰ Address by Senator Thurmond to Virginia Polytechnic Institute (April 4, 1968), Box 30, Thurmond Papers; Bagwell, *School Desegregation in the Carolinas*, p. 142; Burton, 'Dining with Harvey Gantt', p. 210.

⁶¹ Cohodas, *Strom Thurmond*, p. 317; Bass & Thompson, p. 210.

⁶² Sherrill, *The Gothic Politics of the Old South*, p. 253; Edward D. Berkowitz, *Mr Social Security* (University Press of Kansas, 1995), p. 273; Cohodas, *Strom Thurmond*, p. 395.

formidable political force who boasted a President's 'IOU in his pocket.' When Thurmond formalised his long-term estrangement from the Democratic Party by defecting across the aisle in 1964, few imagined such an outcome. On hearing the news, political veteran Jimmy Byrnes shouted to his wife, 'Maude! Maude! Bring me another drink. Strom Thurmond is about to commit political suicide!' Byrnes' exclamation was rooted in nearly a century of Democratic dominance and Republican vilification. So monolithic was the Solid South in South Carolina that, on hearing that Republican presidential candidate Calvin Coolidge had received 1,100 votes in the 1924 general election, U.S. Senator-elect Coleman Blease memorably remarked, 'I do not know where he got them. I was astonished to know that they were cast and shocked to know that they were counted.' Anti-Republicanism infused every area of public life. During a famous murder trial in 1903, the presiding judge even ruled that evidence could be offered that witnesses were Republican to injure their credibility.⁶³

As a result of such intense ostracisation, the party organisation atrophied into desperate shape. For the first half of the twentieth century, Republican politics in South Carolina constituted little more than a knife fight for patronage. In the 1940s and 1950s, there existed a 'set donation' for a Republican wishing to become a postmaster. It was not even clear who was in charge. During this period, the official state GOP procured sworn statements testifying that a rival faction was little more than a sham 'paper organisation' intent on securing the spoils of a Republican presidential victory. Such intra-party squabbling was all too common. In 1932 and 1956, two rival GOP delegations from South Carolina arrived at the Republican National Convention vying to be recognised and seated. At times the state-level organisation even became an unwelcome liability. When Dwight Eisenhower first ran for President in 1952, the Republican Party attempted to remove itself from the ballot to maximise support for the independent 'South Carolinians for Eisenhower' ticket. In a 1974 oral history interview, Strom Thurmond insisted that he 'wouldn't have dared run on the Republican ticket' two decades earlier, and instead preferred to style himself as a 'write-in' candidate instead. Two years after Thurmond's defection, state Republicans continued to play down their

⁶³ Cartoon, 'Uncle Strom's Cabin', *The Daily World* (November 29, 1969), 'Cartoons', Thurmond Papers; Jack Bass & Marilyn W. Thompson, *Strom: The Complicated Personal and Political Life of Strom Thurmond* (Public Affairs, 2005), p. 264; George Brown Tindall, *The Disruption of the Solid South* (University of Georgia Press, 1972), p. 47; Jack Bass, *Porgy Comes Home* (R.L. Bryan Company, 1972), p. 45.

party name. Flyers for the mid-term elections of 1966 referred to 'the GO-Party,' and barely mentioned the Republican name at all. Such marginalisation extended into the most prosaic of forums: South Carolina legislative manuals did not reference the party affiliations of members until 1967.⁶⁴

Despite this history of ostracisation, in the early 1960s Strom Thurmond's impeccable political antennae registered the increasing confluence of national Republican opinion with white voter preference in South Carolina. A particularly strong statistical relationship existed between Strom Thurmond's Dixiecrat vote of 1948 and the ballots cast for Barry Goldwater in 1964. Intriguingly, the more moderate candidacies of Eisenhower in 1952 and Nixon eight years later also bore significant, albeit less pronounced, similarity in voting patterns with support for Thurmond's third-party run in 1948. These connections left institutional footprints. The 1960 organisation 'South Carolinians for Nixon and Lodge' had substantial ties to similar efforts for Eisenhower eight years earlier, as well as the pro-segregationist independent ticket in 1956. Whilst couching his defection from the Democratic Party in philosophical terms, the wily 'master of retail politics' evidently recognised these trends.⁶⁵

In purely quantitative terms, Thurmond's party switch represented an unqualified success. In the five contests after his defection, Senator Thurmond was returned with an average vote of 62 percent. In this light, it satisfied Thurmond's core career goal: perpetual re-election as United States Senator. When southern historian John Shelton Reed tried to find some purpose to Thurmond's political ambitions, the only useful anecdote he could find was a former aide who reported that whilst the Senator 'has almost no sense of humor...he loves to hear stories of political dirty tricks – the same ones, over and over. He laughs and laughs.'

⁶⁴ Daniel Ross Oral History, p. 29; For evidence of these divisions, see: 'Republican Party, 1948, Misc' & 'Republican Party 1949, Misc' in Box 1, General, Republican Party of South Carolina, USCPC; Levona Page, 'S.C. Republicans Not Always United', *The State* (August 4, 1968); John White, 'Managed Compliance', p. 118; For examples of these flyers, see 'South Carolina, 1965', Box 3, PPS 230, 'Correspondence Files, 1966-1968', Nixon Library; South Carolina Legislative Manuals accessed from open stacks at USCPC; Oral History with Strom Thurmond, interviewed by Jack Bass & Walter DeVries (February 1, 1974), Interview A-166, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, p. 6.

⁶⁵ Berman Cosman, *Five States for Goldwater* (University of Alabama Press, 1966), p. 74; Bernard Cosman, 'Presidential Republicanism in the South, 1960', *The Journal of Politics* (May 1962), p. 312-3; Donald Fowler *Presidential Voting in South Carolina: 1948-1964* (University of South Carolina Press, 1966), pp. 10-11 & 33; Bass & Thompson, *Strom*, p. xi.

Thurmond self-identified with electoral success, and would pursue this aim indiscriminately: through race-baiting or, as in later years, a hard-headed acceptance of the African-American electoral influence. In the astute words of one South Carolina NAACP official decades later, 'I never thought Strom Thurmond actually hated black people. He just never really needed them.'⁶⁶

Strom Thurmond instead nurtured a coalition of white voters opposed to the idea of the black franchise. The price Republicans paid for Thurmond's defection was subscription to an ultra-segregationist philosophy. The move also dramatically shaped South Carolina party politics: ensuring that it 'experienced a States' Rights-into-Republican vote prior to the other Deep South states.' Whilst the pre-Thurmond state Republican Party was hardly a bastion racial moderation, it derived more strength from metropolitan conservatives than black-belt white supremacists.⁶⁷ As Strom Thurmond seized control of party machinery, South Carolina Republicanism became increasingly synonymous with racist politicking. Historian I.A. Newby has explained that, 'before the '60's the Republican Party in the state was alternatively ambivalent and hostile towards black Carolinians. As it became a significant force in the '60's, it discarded the ambivalence.' Writing for the *Washington Post* in 1966, Robert Novak and Rowland Evans noted that the South Carolina GOP 'vigorously exclude Negroes.'⁶⁸

Even Thurmond sympathisers boasted that the Senator's defection had 'literally changed the Republican party from black to white in the eyes of South Carolina.' Co-ordinated by Harry Dent, a long-time political associate of Senator Thurmond, racist dirty tricks were deployed to exploit the Democratic party's association with African-American voters. During the 1966 gubernatorial campaign, for example, the GOP

⁶⁶ John Shelton Reed, 'Book Review', *Reason* (June 1993), Accessed at www.findarticles.com on April 18, 2012.

⁶⁷ For examples of the pre-Thurmond state GOP attitude towards black members, see: Oral History with Modjeska Simkins, interviewed by Jacquilyn & Bob Hall (July 28, 1976), interview G-0056-2, University of North Carolina Oral History Project, pp. 46-7, Accessed at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/sohp> on September 12, 2011. For evidence of metropolitan foundations of Republican support pre-Thurmond, see lists of donations and volunteers in the small South Carolinians For Eisenhower collection, USCPC.

⁶⁸ Earl & Merle Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans* (Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 305; Bernard Cosman, *Five States*, p. 72; Bruce Kalk, *The Origins of the Southern Strategy* (Lexington Books, 2002), p. 69; Nadine Cohodas, *Strom Thurmond*, p. 385; I.A. Newby, *Black Carolinians* (University of South Carolina Press, 1973), p. 19; Rowland Evans & Robert Novak, 'Integrating the GOP', *Washington Post* (March 22, 1966).

published a picture of Robert McNair shaking hands with a black lawyer in upstate Cheraw. The stunt was clearly designed to capitalise on Republican candidate Joe Rogers' charges that McNair had opposed civil rights legislation neither 'honestly [n]or effectively.' A year later, Governor McNair privately complained that Republicans 'try to exploit every explosive situation for political purposes,' and lamented that Thurmond's acolytes had 'no sincere interest in South Carolina or her future.'⁶⁹

Playing with Fire: Republican Bellicosity in a Combustible New Era

These comments were a radical *volte face* from McNair's approbation of Thurmond's political style to journalist John Osborne just fifteen months earlier. Two factors altered the Governor's perception of the social harm that the Senator might cause South Carolinian society. Firstly, both the Department of HEW and the judiciary ratcheted up the level of desegregation necessary to qualify for federal funds. The era of tokenism and chicanery was over, replaced by demands for substantive progress. As black South Carolinians increasingly exercised their constitutional rights over Jim Crow, their white neighbours sporadically responded with shocking viciousness. In late August 1967, a fifteen-strong group of African-American students and parents involved in the desegregation of Harleyville-Ridgeville High School in black-belt Dorchester County were brutally assaulted by 150 angry whites after attending their high school's football game. Even the local sheriff described the incident as 'a real riot,' as children as young as six years old emerged from the melee with 'blood gushing' out of their noses.⁷⁰

In February 1968, these tensions exploded in a black-belt college town. The Orangeburg Massacre, where three unarmed, protesting black students were killed and many more wounded by state troopers, exposed the limitations of this 'aristocratic' model of accommodating the challenges presented by the civil rights era.

⁶⁹ Arthur M. Wilcox, 'Thurmond Survives Fall-Out From Anti-Nixon Gibes', *Charleston Evening Post*, 'Correspondence: Counties, Abbeville -Florence' (Sept. 19-Nov. 9, 1968), Box 23, Campaigns, Thurmond Papers, Clemson; 1968 Untitled Speech beginning 'My Fellow South Carolinians: The purpose of elections...' (c. 1966), 'Campaigns, Gubernatorial, 1966: Speeches', Box 1, Joe Rogers Collection, USCPC; Robert McNair to G. Richard Shafto (April 5, 1967), 'General, 1967', Box 30, McNair Papers.

⁷⁰ Rosetta E. Ross, 'The Life and Work of Victoria W. DeLee' (Master's Thesis, Emory University, 1995), pp. 195-6; 'Negroes Beaten Up: Incident Investigated', *Sumter Daily Item* (September 1, 1967); Report Covering Months of August & September, 1967, 'Newman, I. DeQuincey, Reports, 1967-1968'. South Carolina Files, NAACP Papers, p. 7.

Police brutality at Orangeburg was precipitated by students at a local all-black state college engaging in unruly street protest against a segregated bowling alley a few blocks from campus.⁷¹ Overt racial prejudice was common in the city. Returning from stationing in Europe in late 1967, one black U.S. Air Force sergeant was greeted in his native Orangeburg with contempt. When enquiring about letting a small apartment, its white owner bluntly insisted 'it's not for rent to niggers,' whilst a visit to the local doctor involved waiting in a dingy space marked 'Colored Waiting Room.' Having anticipated a new era of race relations since his departure six years earlier, the veteran angrily described his return as 'like stepping out of heaven into hell.'⁷²

Changing expectations constituted McNair's second concern. For decades, the state's black populace exhibited a broadly conservative mentality. As activist Modejska Simkins observed, this phenomenon was best expressed by comparing the reaction to Rosa Parks' discriminatory treatment to the assault on Sarah Mae Flemming a year earlier. 'The people of Montgomery walked and the ministers of Montgomery talked, and acted, and walked, Simkins bitterly recalled a decade later, 'but not one minister in Columbia raised his voice. Not one.' I.A. Newby even posited that South Carolina's black citizens 'were perhaps more moderate in their racial demands in the '60's and less attracted to radicalism than blacks in any other state in the Deep South.' Despite its uses as propaganda for South Carolina whites, the argument bears scrutiny. For a start, South Carolina was 'consistently an NAACP state,' and more radical groups such as SNCC, CORE and SCLC never broke the organisation's dominance.⁷³ The state NAACP both reflected a more conservative black populace than other southern states, and attempted to create a culture of constructive working relationships with white elites. As I. DeQuincey Newman, the state's veteran NAACP executive director, privately explained to Governor McNair in January 1967, 'I am convinced that the Negro minority can gain more ground politically if our gains are pursued without publicity or fanfare.' Yet even Newman was hardly

⁷¹ For a more detailed description of events at Orangeburg, see: Jack Bass & Jack Nelson, *The Orangeburg Massacre* (Mercer University Press, 1984) or Pat Watters & Weldon Rougeau, *Events at Orangeburg* (Southern Regional Council, 1968).

⁷² Oral History with Daniel McLeod (January 25-26, 1980), 1/17/2, McNair Oral History Project, p. 26; News Release, 'The South Carolina Council on Human Relations Announces Operation Gratitude' (c. late 1967), 'General, 1967', Box 30, McNair Papers.

⁷³ For evidence of the NAACP's dominance, see: *South Carolina's Blacks and Native Americans: 1776-1976*, produced by the Bicentennial Project Editorial Board (The State Human Affairs Commission, 1976), pp. 146-7.

the most conservative civil rights activist in the Palmetto State. In 1967 he complained that local NAACP branches' responses to a summer voter registration drive had ranged from indifferent to 'downright antagonistic,' which Newman explained was the result of 'fear on the part of Negroes in a situation with a long history of white supremacy and attendant intimidation.'⁷⁴

The capital city of Columbia presented a paradigmatic example of how these racial hierarchies conditioned behaviour. A month after passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, sixty prominent Columbians secretly met to discuss the city's response to the legislation. Without dissent, the group requested that the mayor appoint two committees, one white and the other black, 'for the purpose of providing authorised local channels of communication for making future adjustments with dignity among our people.' Apart from an occasional joint executive session, the two groups operated as separate entities. Writing to James Hinton, head of the black committee, one veteran South Carolina civil rights activist complained that such a structure 'seems about two years behind the times.'⁷⁵

Despite its success in maintaining social order and securing moderate gains in employment for 'qualified' African-American, by 1968, the committee's style and structure experienced significant criticism. In a letter addressed to Mayor Lester Bates in May that year, the white committee's leader observed that 'the leadership in the Negro community is changing – and changing fast,' with the result that both he and James Hinton had 'lost much of our effectiveness.' A culture of respectable race relations masked the lack of genuine progress. In 1967, South Carolina had the lowest percentage of black college students enrolled in state-supported institutions in the South. The same year, Robert McNair received a report detailing the absence of any African-American representation within either the state Highway Patrol or SLED. Instructively, it was these

⁷⁴ Modjeska Simkins interviewed by Blake McNulty (December 29, 1966), Folder 10, Box 6, Subseries 1.2 Columbia, South Carolina, 1966-1992, 'Will the Circle Be Unbroken?' Papers, Emory; Newby, *Black Carolinians*, p. 25; Cox, '1963 – The Year of Decision', pp. 40 & 48; I. DeQuincey Newman interviewed by Worth Long (June 30, 1983), Folder 10, Box 6, Subseries 1.2 Columbia, South Carolina, 1966-1992, 'Will the Circle Be Unbroken?' Papers, Emory; I. DeQuincey Newman to Robert McNair (January 30, 1967), 'General, 1967', Box 30, McNair Papers; I. DeQuincey Newman to Althea T.L. Simmons, 'South Carolina NAACP Summer Voter Registration Project' (c. August 1965), 'Newman, I. DeQuincey, Reports, 1965-1966', South Carolina Reports, NAACP Papers, Rothermere American Institute.

⁷⁵ Lester Bates to William O' Neal (August 12, 1964) & John McCray to James Hinton (July 17, 1964): both in 'Projects, Cola. Community Relations Council, Formation of, 1964', Box 1, Bates Papers, USCPC.

two law enforcement agencies that were directly involved in the Orangeburg Massacre.⁷⁶

Lester Bates would soon receive first-hand evidence of how outdated the 'conspiracy of peace' had become. A new generation of activists now dismissed their conservative elders as 'Uncle Toms' whose compromise with white elites constituted a poor bargain for African Americans. One report that year directed towards the mayor and his committee from black students at the University of South Carolina ably articulated such frustrations. It began with the sobering thought that 'more and more Negroes are beginning to feel that violence is the "only way" to change the existing problems within their communities.' Law enforcement was a particularly sore point. Despite having served as officers for fifteen years, African-American policemen were still restricted to their own communities and had only recently been granted access to patrol cars. The white power structure remained very much in control. 'Other than insurance men and delinquent bill collectors,' the report observed, 'the Negro community never sees a white person, especially a city official until a white policeman arrives.'

In a none-too-subtle attack on the Community Relations Council, the authors bitterly concluded that 'the only real distinction between our local "liberals" and "conservatives" is that the conservative openly voices his opposition to "Negro advancement" whereas the liberal attempts to cope with it only because he has the foresight to know he cannot hinder it successfully.' In a similar vein, a year later the university's Association of Afro-American students wrote to Mayor Bates complaining that, 'your grand tour of the ghetto was an insult to the Black people of Columbia. It was a clear indication of your conception of our political maturity.' Black South Carolinians had begun to chafe against the chains of the racially paternalistic 'conspiracy of peace'.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ W.G. Lyles to Lester Bates (May 10, 1968), 'Projects, Cola, Community Relations Council, Org., Gen.' Box 1, Bates Papers, USCPC; Jack Bass & Jack Nelson, *The Orangeburg Massacre* (Mercer University Press, 1984), pp. 3-4; Wayne Seal to Robert McNair, 'Negro Employment' (August 7, 1967), Box 30, McNair Papers.

⁷⁷ John G. Sproat, 'Firm Flexibility', p. 173; 'Weep no more, Columbia', *Newsweek* (May 3, 1965) & Association of Afro-American Students to Lester Bates (February 10, 1969): both in 'Projects, Cola. Community Relations Council, Race Relations, Gen.', Box 1, Bates Papers, USCPC; 'Report to Mayor Lester L. Bates and the Community Relations Council on the Causes of Racial Unrest in Columbia', edited by Franchot A. Brown (c. 1968), 'Projects, Cola. Community Relations Council, Race Relations, "Report to Mayor Lester L. Bates", 1968', Box 1, Bates Papers, USCPC.

According to one recent study, black mobilisation helped precipitate GOP growth. South Carolina was no exception, as state Republicans luxuriated in the political opportunities presented by burgeoning African-American militancy. A statement released by Republican congressman Albert Watson just days after the Orangeburg Massacre blindly commended the courage of the law enforcement officials who had fired on unarmed protesters. In a swipe at ‘conspiracy of peace’ moderates back home, Watson suggested that lessons could be learned about ‘the proper way to curb a serious civil disturbance.’ Whilst Watson very obviously tapped into the same anxieties preyed upon by George Wallace, similar rhetoric could also be found in the public pronouncements of the Republican presidential nominee that year, Richard M. Nixon. Having followed Nixon on the campaign trail that year, journalist John Osborne concluded that the GOP nominee’s attempt to differentiate himself from Wallace was merely the claim that ‘he rather than Wallace is the candidate who can be counted upon to restore in America the kind of peace and order that the Wallace Americans cry for.’ Whilst Richard Nixon publicly rejected the ‘fool’s gold of racist votes’, the candidate’s obsession with ‘law and order’ at any price built a bridge to southern Republicans’ militancy. One state-wide poll a year earlier indicated that its discussion of race relations in South Carolina ‘could just as easily have been classified under the general heading of “Law and Order.”’⁷⁸

The ‘Southernization’ of Nixon’s 1968 Presidential Campaign

Just as Strom Thurmond both engineered and reflected ‘the institutionalization of protest’ within the South Carolina GOP, so Richard Nixon campaigned along similar lines: lambasting the federal government as dominated by liberal elites more concerned with perverse social engineering than the welfare of the majority. When Thurmond publicly repudiated rumours of another third-party run in February 1968, he listed anti-Communism alongside law-and-order as key reasons to support the Republican ticket instead. Front-and-

⁷⁸ M.V. Hood III, Quentin Kidd & Irwin L. Morris, ‘Two Sides of the Same Coin? Black Electoral Mobilization and GOP Growth in the Modern South’, Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southern Political Science Association (January 5, 2006): Accessed at <http://www.allacademic.com> on March 9, 2011; Bass & Nelson, *The Orangeburg Massacre*, p. 43; John Osborne, ‘One Dollar for the First Black Face’, *New Republic* (October 12, 1968), p. 15; David Ballatyne, ‘Managing the backlash’, *Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Society* (2013), p.20.

centre, though, was his insistence that the GOP had adopted ‘a much sounder stance against big government spending and centralization of power in Washington’ than the Democratic Party. During a series of meetings in early summer 1968, Richard Nixon persuaded Strom Thurmond that his candidacy would pursue such themes; and, vitally, that it would succeed in producing a Republican White House.⁷⁹

That Thurmond thirsted for access to federal patronage should not have been surprising, since his third-party antics in 1948 had ensured that for two decades no occupant of the White House felt any urge to court his favour. By contrast, Robert McNair’s close relationship with Lyndon Johnson ensured ‘unusually kind treatment in encounters with federal agencies.’ Placed alongside McNair’s constructive relations with these organisations at a regional level, it was no surprise that the Governor’s Office became a hub of federal grantsmanship in the 1960s. Thurmond typically had to rely on rhetoric alone to sustain his electoral appeal. Widely regarded by even his enemies as having ‘more in-grained political sense than anybody I’ve ever known,’ Senator Thurmond surely realised that such a situation represented a perpetual threat to his chances of re-election.⁸⁰

Accordingly, Senator Thurmond refused to endorse the claims of California Governor Ronald Reagan, whose beliefs tallied far closer to white South Carolinians than those held by Richard Nixon. Thurmond would not commit himself to an unelectable candidate like four years earlier. As one Thurmond confidante openly remarked during Nixon’s 1972 re-election campaign, in 1968 Reagan was his ‘first love’ whereas Nixon was widely recognised as ‘the best overall man who could win.’ Explaining his decision to Governor Reagan himself, Thurmond insisted that supporting former Vice President Nixon represented ‘the most effective way to promote the principles you and I espouse.’ That Nixon constituted even a compromise candidate for South Carolinians was a novel development. Undoubtedly, the former Vice President’s virulent anti-communism

⁷⁹ Louis Seagull, *Southern Republicanism* (Wiley, 1975), p.104. For fuller journalistic account of the meeting, see Lewis Chester, Godfrey Hodgson, & Bruce Page, *An American Melodrama* (Andre Deutsch, 1969), pp. 446-7 & Theodore H. White, *The Making of the President, 1968* (Jonathan Cape, 1969), pp. 137-8.

⁸⁰ Statement by Senator Strom Thurmond (February 8, 1968); Willard Edwards, ‘If Helping Lyndon Johnson A Political Crime, He’s Guilty’, *Chicago Tribune* (July 30, 1966), ‘General, 1966’, Box 106, McNair Papers; Oral History with Ted Riley, interviewed by John J. Duffy & George D. Terry (February 11, 1987), USCPC, p. 32.

and strong foreign policy stances resonated with the white South; as did his hardline approach to social disorder. Richard Nixon's real problem was his history of racial moderation.⁸¹

During the 1960 presidential campaign, the South Carolina Democratic Party published a faux newspaper entitled 'Dixie News' that lambasted Nixon's membership of the NAACP and contribution to Eisenhower's limited civil rights reforms. At a Democratic Party rally in upstate Chesterfield, Senator Olin Johnston insisted that 'anyone who votes Republican endorses Republican plans to "Little Rock" South Carolina schools with federal bayonets...[and] endorses Nixon's plans to put a negro in the Cabinet.' Eight years later, many South Carolinians vividly recalled these accusations. Seeing a campaign bumper sticker emblazoned with 'Nixon's the One,' a disgruntled correspondent to the *Charleston News & Courier* angrily retorted, 'I'll say he is. "The one" who helped promote Warren to the Chief Justiceship; "the one" who was a part of an administration that sent federal troops into Little Rock to shove bayonets at unarmed school children; "the one" who was a member of the NAACP...' The flames of resentment against Nixon were eagerly fanned by George Wallace, whose stump speeches in Dixie reminded their audience of the many things the former Vice President 'has said and done' against the South.⁸²

In answering such charges, Nixon was not in a position to 'out-segregate' George Wallace. Historian Matthew Lassiter has convincingly demonstrated that Nixon's electoral campaign in 1968 was contingent on the development of a 'suburban' rather than 'southern' strategy. As Nixon's political adviser Kevin Phillips privately observed, 'this year's campaign must not make any move which would risk the electoral votes of the peripheral South – to say nothing of those elsewhere in the nation – for the unnecessary and small prizes of a few Deep South electoral votes.' Although Phillips would later be castigated for his plans to capitalise on racial resentment to create a new Republican majority in the South, he recognised that appealing to pure

⁸¹ Ed Rogers, 'Successful Dixie Campaigner Dent To Hit Vote-Getting Trail'. *Columbia Record* (July 31, 1972), 'HSD Clippings' (January-December, 1971), Folder 333, Box 11, Dent Papers, Clemson; Strom Thurmond to Ronald Reagan (June 21, 1968), Folder II: May 2-June 30, 1968, 'Political Affairs 2-1-1', Box 26, Subject Correspondence, Thurmond Papers, Clemson.

⁸² Russell Merritt, 'The Senatorial Election of 1962', *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 98:3 (July 1997) p. 283; Harold A Moore to *News and Courier* editorial page (c. 1968), 'Correspondence: Miscellaneous', Box 25, Campaigns, Thurmond Papers; Marshall Frady, *Wallace*, p. 26.

Wallace sentiment constituted political suicide for Nixon in 1968.⁸³

Instead, the Nixon campaign criticised the implementation of civil rights legislation, rather than the laws themselves, to score points with white southerners. This tack had already been pursued with some success by white southern elites, who in the years following the Civil Rights Act of 1964 demonised HEW's implementation of the 'guidelines' required for southern institutions to qualify for federal funding under Title VI of the legislation. As observed by a trio of London *Sunday Times* journalists covering the presidential election, 'guidelines...had become a euphemism for the discussion of racial problems in the South.' On September 11, 1968, candidate Nixon made his play in this direction during an interview with WBTV in Charlotte, North Carolina. Having argued that school integration had not served a 'useful purpose' for education, Nixon observed that he did not approve of the federal government 'act[ing] as local school districts,' and that such activity 'should be very scrupulously examined and in many cases should be rescinded.' If guidelines served as proxy for discussion of racial matters, Nixon had effectively draped himself in a Confederate flag and whistled 'Dixie.'⁸⁴

Richard Nixon's Charlotte statement quickly became a source of much excitement in the white South. On the eve of the candidate's visit to Atlanta, local supporters demanded that Nixon repeat the position in person. The Palmetto State was no different. Before the Republican nominee arrived in upstate South Carolina, he was advised that this stance represented the 'top issue' and 'a matter of overriding importance' in the state. Instructively, Thurmond personally contacted the Nixon campaign shortly before the candidate arrived in the South to demand that the candidate 'pledge a reversal of the shift of power to Washington and...adhere to his HEW guideline position taken in Charlotte.' The Charlotte speech created significant distance in the southern

⁸³ Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton University Press, 2006), pp. 232-3; Kevin Phillips to John Mitchell, 'Strategizing the South in the 1968 Campaign (c. 1968)', 'Kevin Phillips (4 of 5)', Box 84 (1 of 2), 'Returned WHCF SMOF: Garment, Len, 1968 Political Campaign File – File Cabinet, Nixon Papers, Nixon Library; "'The Emerging Republican Majority": It's Not That Simple', *The Ripon Forum* (October 1969), pp. 9-20.

⁸⁴ Lewis Chester, Godfrey Hodgson & Bruce Page, *An American Melodrama* (Andre Deutsch, 1969), pp. 459-60; Transcript of Nixon's interview with WBTV in Charlotte, North Carolina (September 11, 1968), in Chuck Stewart to Jim Keogh (April 7, 1969), '105 closed (desegregation) (2 of 2)', Box 30, Ehrlichman Files, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

mind between the positions of Nixon and Humphrey on civil rights. In Clarendon County, where the *Brown* decision had begun two decades earlier, the *Manning Times* delighted in reporting that 'Nixon Raps HEW on Schools, Favors "Freedom of Choice"'. By contrast, the paper insisted the Humphrey campaign promised 'No Let Up in School Guidelines.'⁸⁵

This tack was aggressively pursued by the 'Thurmond Speaks for Nixon-Agnew' committee co-ordinating Nixon's push down South. As well as prominently displaying the contents of Nixon's Charlotte speech, flyers distributed to five southern states boasted that the Nixon campaign was endorsed by numerous high-profile sons of Dixie, none of whom represented the metropolitan face of southern Republicanism. In 1956 General Mark Clark, for example, loudly supported the state legislature's effort to restore segregation in the army: observing of the 1950 executive order that, 'I did not feel that we should integrate then and I do not think so now.' By early October 1968, the Thurmond Speaks Committee was flooding South Carolina television with twenty second, one-minute, and five-minute spots that featured Senator Thurmond, a repeat of Nixon's Charlotte interview, and General Clark. Meanwhile, the Texan singing-cowboy Stuart Hamblin endorsed Nixon on radio. Just as the Nixon campaign flooded Florida with adverts 'aimed at the Wallace vote,' so it focussed on every rural community in South Carolina at least once, even sending these voters campaign-branded mats. Every television spot made for the Nixon campaign across the nation was rigorously examined for 'anything that might offend Strom Thurmond, that might annoy the Wallace voter whom Nixon was trying so hard for.'⁸⁶

Whilst it never indulged in openly-racist rhetoric, the Nixon campaign was keen to segment this southern campaign from its national image. Harry Treleven, the former advertising executive credited with creating

⁸⁵ Sherm Unger to Richard Nixon, 'Atlanta, Georgia, (Thursday October 3, 1968)' & Sherm Unger to Richard Nixon, 'Greenville/Spartanburg, S.C. – Friday, October, 1968': both in Box 3, Appearance File (PPS 140), Campaign 1968 Collection, Nixon Papers, Nixon Library; Raymond Wolters, *Race and Education, 1954-2007* (University of Missouri Press, 2008), p. 143.

⁸⁶ For contents of flyers and evidence of their destinations, see 'Folder I – Oct 12 – Nov 1, 1968', Box 26, Campaigns, Thurmond Papers; Quint, *Profile in Black and White*, p. 125; Fred La Rue to John Mitchell, 'Thurmond Speaks Committee' (October 2, 1968), 'Thurmond' & State-by-state breakdown of United Citizens for Nixon-Agnew advertising costs, 'Miscellaneous Papers (3 of 4) : both in Box 84 (1 of 2), Returned WHCF SMOF: Garment, Leo, 1968 Political Campaign File – File Cabinet, 1968 Campaign; Joe McGinniss, *The Selling of the President 1968* (Andre Deutsch, 1970), p. 89.

the 'Nixon's the One' slogan, was 'never privy' to this part of the campaign. Commercials containing Thurmond's rants against crime, busing, and the Supreme Court were used 'very selectively'. Evidence of this segmentation was provided during Nixon's visit to Spartanburg and Greenville in October 1968. Despite Thurmond's ministrations, the candidate neglected to mention school desegregation or HEW at all. Instead, the Nixon campaign distributed flyers reiterating the thrust of the candidate's Charlotte speech, a manoeuvre that minimised the potential for national journalists to emphasise Nixon's relationship with Dixie. The omission was reported to have 'surprised some upstate leaders.' One prominent Republican official even cited the affair as the pretext for realising that 'Mr. Nixon stands for the same things that drove thousands of us, including Senator Thurmond, out of the Democratic Party in 1948,' and defected to the South Carolina Republicans for Wallace. The tension between Richard Nixon's need to court white southerners whilst appearing moderate to the rest of the nation was palpable. Whilst Nixon wooed his audience with firm commitments to restoring peace at home and abroad, he neglected to deal with the issue at the forefront of South Carolinian's minds.⁸⁷

Four weeks after his whistle-stop tour of South Carolina, Richard Nixon carried the Palmetto State with 38 percent of the vote. Twenty years after resoundingly endorsing Thurmond's third-party revolt against federal enforcement of civil rights, the Palmetto State voters gave George Wallace a disappointing 32 percent. Running just two percentage points behind Wallace, Humphrey completed a triumvirate of competitive presidential candidates that reflected the flux of party loyalties in South Carolina. He captured the bulk of the state's 154,245 black votes: 24 percent of the total electorate. The white vote was infinitely more fragmented. As political scientist Paul Beck observed of the region as a whole in this period, white voters 'adopted a stance of neutrality towards the two-party system.' Wallace's candidacy complicated this phenomenon even further. White South Carolinians were torn between three candidates. A week before the election, ten staff members from Columbia's most popular Sunday newspaper fanned out state-wide for two days of research, resulting in over two-hundred interviews. The results demonstrated a party system in disarray, with 'widespread, old-line Democratic support' sitting alongside many whites who assumed a Wallace victory but

⁸⁷ McGinness, *The Selling of the President*, pp. 120-3; Irvin Molotsky, 'H.W. Treleaven, Nixon Consultant, Dies at 76', *New York Times* (December 20, 1998); Philip Grose, 'Nixon Urges S.C. Voters Not To Support Wallace' *The State* (October 5, 1968); Public Statement by Ed B. Smith (October 30, 1968), Folder 113, James Duffy Papers, Clemson.

actually intended to vote Nixon. In Charleston, reporters were shocked to find that much of the 'blue stocking' elite was pro-Wallace, a candidate who also enjoyed the fealty of rural whites angered by the 'damn Negroes.' The article's byline, 'Mixed Emotions: Change Wanted', accurately summarised the confusion.⁸⁸

In an election riddled with social and political flux, South Carolina voters chose to follow the endorsement of a politician whose opposition to change represented a reassuring constant. Tom Turnipseed, who ran George Wallace's presidential campaign in South Carolina, later lamented that Strom Thurmond's endorsement of Nixon 'killed us.' A voter from Saluda, located fifty-miles west of Columbia, explained that after three months careful consideration he and his wife had decided to settle for Thurmond's choice; and insisted that 'if Strom proves wrong then we will go down with him.' Quantitative data supported this trend. A survey conducted in July 1968 reported that twenty-eight percent of South Carolina voters would have changed their mind positively about the party's nominee for the U.S. Senate had Thurmond campaigned on his behalf. It is fair to assume that voters felt similarly about Thurmond's choice for President. Indeed, the presidential results could hardly be seen as evidence of a broader partisan alignment within South Carolina. Nixon offered short coattails for the state Republican candidates, whose gains two years earlier were decisively repudiated. It was even alleged that Wallaceites angry with Thurmond's defection punished local Republican candidates. The executive committee of the Charleston County GOP claimed that their support for Nixon's presidential bid cost an entire slate of incumbent state senators, representatives, and county councilmen.⁸⁹

The national media certainly perceived the Californian's incursions into Dixie as a function of Strom Thurmond's political influence rather than a broader partisan realignment. One *Charlotte Observer* cartoon entitled 'Put me down!' showed the South Carolina Senator in full lifeguard regalia carrying a helpless Nixon

⁸⁸ 'The State House - Pitch For Rocky', *The State* (June 4, 1968); Paul Allen Beck, 'Partisan Dealignment in the Postwar South', *American Political Science Review* 71:2 (1977), p. 404; Charles H. Wickenberg, 'Mixed Emotions: Change Wanted' *The State & Columbia Record* (November 3, 1968).

⁸⁹ Bass & Thompson, *Strom*, p. 209; J.A. Hart to Strom Thurmond (c. October 1968), 'Correspondence: Counties, Newberry - York' (Oct. 24-Dec. 11, 1968), Box 23, Campaigns, Thurmond Papers, Clemson; Central Surveys Inc., 'An Opinion Survey: Race for U.S. Senate: South Carolina Voters, July 22-24, 1968', in 'Powell, C. Kenneth Papers, 1968', Box 1, Powell Papers, USCPC; "'The Emerging Republican Majority': It's Not That Simple', *Ripon Forum* (October 1969), pp. 19-20; 'State of the Southern States: South Carolina', *New South* 24:1 (Winter 1969), pp. 70-1; Executive Committee of Charleston County Republican Party to John Mitchell (January 30, 1971), 'Powell, C. Kenneth, Papers, 1971, Judicial.....', Box 1, Powell Papers.

into 'Thurmond country'. The intensity of the Senator's campaigning for Nixon, which involved more than eighty speeches and fifty press conferences, ensured that his message of support reached the vast majority of white voters in South Carolina and throughout Dixie. In total, the Thurmond Speaks Campaign distributed 2.5 million flyers across the South, and the majority of campaign material in the southern states that were captured by the Republican candidate. As a result, just a week after Nixon's victory Thurmond confidently assured the South Carolina GOP executive committee to expect substantial patronage from the incoming Administration.⁹⁰

Post-Election, South Carolina Expects

More importantly, Strom Thurmond publicly insisted that Nixon's election would decisively shift the federal government's attitude towards civil rights enforcement. Sumter No. 17 school district demonstrated the effects of such rhetoric. Having discussed the potential impact of a Republican presidential victory on September 17, 1968, the Board of Trustees responded to Nixon's election by dropping a desegregation plan negotiated with HEW and announced four months earlier. This was not an isolated incident. Hastings Wyman, Thurmond's administrative aide at the time, recalled that Nixon's rhetoric heavily implied a change in direction under his Administration. Strom Thurmond certainly believed so. At a fifty-minute press conference in Washington D.C. shortly after Nixon's victory, Thurmond proudly announced that southern school districts should 'slow stall' HEW compliance staff, and instead wait until Nixon took office because the incoming President would be 'more fair and reasonable' in his dealings with southern educators. The *Columbia State* reported that local parents fighting HEW desegregation plans were emboldened by the declaration, and one McNair staffer recalled an optimistic mood amongst recalcitrant whites that a new day in civil rights administration had arrived.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Cartoon entitled 'Put me down!', *Charlotte Observer* (August 18, 1968), Cartoons, Thurmond Papers.; Original Minutes, State Executive Committee Meeting, Columbia, SC (November 14, 1968) & GOParty Leader-gram (November 7, 1968): both in Folder 114, Duffy Papers, Clemson.

⁹¹ Gregory L. Vagn, 'With All Deliberate Resistance,' (Honors Thesis, Emory University, 1987), pp. 66-70; Lee Bandy, 'Thurmond Tells Schools Ignore HEW Demands', *The State* (December 19, 1968); Levona Page, 'Educators Cool To Stalling' *The State* (December 20, 1968); Author interviews with Hastings Wyman (June 28, 2009) & Phil Grose (April 15, 2009)

Instructively, the prospects of Nixon's victory meant that civil rights bureaucrats 'dramatically increased' their operations in anticipation of a slowdown. As early as October 10 1968, U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark telephoned Harold Howe, head of the U.S. Office of Education, to insist that the Johnson Administration issue a statement to 'confront the new Administration with a broad public position as to which it could not avoid some response.' South Carolina officials evinced far more scepticism. State Superintendent Cyril Busbee accepted the emotive power of Thurmond's words, but carefully observed that school officials might also care to examine 'the declarations of the court and administrative declarations they have in hand.' A school superintendent in the midlands town of Swansea reiterated Busbee's point more explicitly: refusing to comment on the statement for fear of provoking existing local racial tensions.⁹²

As well as undermining the central assumption of the 'conspiracy of peace', that federal enforcement of civil rights could not be overturned, Strom Thurmond's words threatened to exacerbate the delicate state of race relations in South Carolina. Looking back at the period, former state attorney general Daniel McLeod recalled with only slight exaggeration that 'we had martial law...all the time.' State Republicans like Senator Thurmond were deliberately tugging apart the 'conspiracy of peace's' fraying threads. In Columbia, South Carolina, the McNair Administration felt this keenly. Phil Grose, a McNair aide and newspaper reporter, later observed that the Nixon-Thurmond campaign down South was a 'spark too close to the dry tinder.'⁹³

Quite apart from the ugly hubris of Thurmond's statement, it illustrated perfectly the party schism within South Carolina politics between a Democratic establishment inured to the reality and inevitability of school desegregation; and a Republican party far removed from the levers of executive power, and determined to capitalise on a wave of protest against the federal government for the purposes of party-building. The phraseology deployed by Thurmond and Busbee was itself suggestive. The South Carolina Senator mistakenly conceived of civil rights administration as the function of presidential will rather than the subject

⁹² 'Enforcers Get Tough on Civil Rights', *National Observer* (c. January 1969), in 'Desegregation, Public Schools, General, 1969', Box 30, McNair Papers; Harold Howe II to Wilbur Cohen, 'Civil Rights Position Paper' (October 10, 1968), 'CR 5-1 Court Orders (Enforcement)', Box 345, RG 12, NARA; Page, 'Educators Cool To Stalling'.

⁹³ Oral History with Daniel McLeod , p. 26; Author's Interview with Phil Grose.

of a myriad of administrative regulations, judicial decisions, and a disproportionately liberal civil service. By contrast, Busbee's words cleverly alluded to such constraints without endangering his own position amongst segregationist whites, on whom he relied for re-election. Even well-informed South Carolinians committed Thurmond's error. Commenting on the administration of school desegregation guidelines in September 1968, *The State's* editorial team insisted that, if victorious, a Republican Administration would dismiss 'the present bunch of bureaucrats' in HEW, and optimistically concluded that their replacements 'couldn't be any worse.' Four out of the six South Carolina dailies also backed Nixon's stance on the issue.⁹⁴

This conclusion was hopelessly naïve and ill-informed, since federal bureaucrats enjoyed strong job protection; with only those occupying the top echelons replaced by an incoming President. Moreover, a President committed to upholding the law could neither renege on reams of legislation and regulation, nor defy the judiciary's interpretation of how they should be enforced. On May 27, 1968, the Supreme Court emphatically endorsed the Fourth Circuit of Appeal's judgement that 'freedom of choice is not a sacred talisman...if it fails to undo segregation, other means must be used to achieve this end.' Issued just five days before Nixon met Strom Thurmond in Atlanta, it essentially rendered freedom-of-choice plans redundant; whatever Richard Nixon might promise in his presidential campaign. Instructively, as late as April 1970 Strom Thurmond had still not read the decision in full. Had the Senator done so, he might have realised that the civil rights era could not be derailed by a single national election. For white South Carolina, Strom Thurmond and his fellow southern Republicans, the first year of Nixon's presidency would provide an unwelcome education in the mechanics of federal administration.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ 'Pressurized Schools', *The State* (September 12, 1968); David W. Bledsoe, 'Papers Back Nixon, Hollings In State' *The State* (November 2, 1968). For evidence of these difficulties faced by incoming President Nixon in controlling the bureaucracy, see: Hugh Davis Graham, *The Civil Rights Era* (Oxford University Press, 1990); Joel D. Aberbach & Bert A. Rockman, 'Clashing Beliefs Within the Executive Branch', *American Political Science Review* 70:2 (June, 1976), 399-413; Richard L. Cole & David A. Caputo, 'Presidential Control of the Senior Civil Service', *American Political Science Review* 73:2 (June 1979), 399-413.

⁹⁵ *Green v. County School Board*, 391 U.S. 430, 441 (1968); Bass & Thompson, *Strom*, p. 230.

Chapter II:

After the Revolution:

Richard Nixon, The Southern Strategy and Presidential Power, 1969

Shortly before his Inaugural Ceremony, Richard Nixon sat down with a yellow legal pad and mapped out solutions to the policy problems he would soon encounter as president. Comporting with Richard Neustadt's description of the thinking displayed by incoming Administrations, the President-elect's thoughts presented a striking mixture of 'arrogance, adrenaline and naiveté.' Addressing Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which mandated no federal funds be funnelled to racially discriminatory recipients, Nixon composed a set of instructions to be pursued by HEW's Office for Civil Rights. These consisted of diversifying away from the sanction of fund terminations using 'a variety of incentives and pressure,' as well as implementing a review of each case under federal scrutiny. Adding some conceptual flesh to such bare bones, Nixon summarised his approach as 'one of friendly persuasion' that would strive to avoid ultimatums or rigid standards.

The incoming President appeared barely aware of the interminable battles fought by the Johnson Administration to even *begin* the process of desegregation. Robert Finch, the new head of Health, Education and Welfare, evidenced a similar overconfidence. During the handover period, Finch rebuffed efforts from senior civil servants to outline the intricate politics of civil rights enforcement. Both Finch and Nixon believed that correctable flaws in federal enforcement had precipitated the rancour that existed between the department and the white South. As Harry Dent later recalled, 'Nixon was convinced that the application of reason was the answer at HEW.'¹

¹ Godfrey Hodgson, 'Obituary: Richard Neustadt', *The Guardian* (London: November 3, 2003); Untitled Nixon note beginning, 'Jan 20 & Jan 21', 'President's Handwriting: January 1969', President's Handwriting, President's Office Files, NARA; Ruby Martin, 'The Nixon Administration: A View From Outside', in *Southern Desegregation: Retrospect and Prospect*, edited by Eugene C. Lee (Southern Newspaper Publishers, 1970), p. 54; Harry S. Dent, *The Prodigal*

When criticising Title VI enforcement during the election campaign, Nixon had justified his opposition to widespread application of fund terminations in philosophical terms. This was understandable given the nature of a contest dealing in generalities, and the necessity of appealing to a wide coalition of voters that included those who had both warmly supported and vehemently opposed the provision's parent legislation four years earlier. Unfortunately, just as Nixon had no 'secret plan' to end the Vietnam War, so these notes evidence that his Title VI policies were similarly underdeveloped.

Consequently, it would take his Administration more than eighteen months to shoehorn such inchoate principles into a coherent, good-faith strategy to desegregate southern schools; not least because up until the *Alexander v. Holmes* decision of October 29 1969, the White House believed it enjoyed a high level of legal discretion in this area. For example, the joint HEW-Justice statement issued on July 3, 1969, assumed it unnecessary 'to lay down a single arbitrary date by which the segregation process should be completed.' Equivocation replaced substantive policy decisions on the matter as the White House sought to negotiate a satisfactory compromise between its legal responsibilities and electoral promises. Just a month before the Supreme Court unanimously insisted that school districts complete desegregation 'at once,' President Nixon explained to reporters that 'there are two extreme groups. There are those who want instant integration and those who want segregation forever. I believe that we need to have a middle course between those two extremes. That is the course in which we are embarked. I think it is correct.' As several liberal analysts sombrely observed, Nixon's comments labelled as 'extreme' a position soon adopted by the Supreme Court.²

Civil rights activists were appalled. In the summer of 1969, Winifred Green, a prominent field worker for the American Friends Service Committee, a Quaker foundation that promoted racial progress, told a reporter

South Returns to Power (John Wiley & Sons, 1978), p. 129.

² 'Text of statement by Finch and Mitchell on School Desegregation Policy,' *New York Times* (July 4, 1969); *Public Papers of the Presidents: Richard Nixon, 1969* (U.S. Government Printing Office 1971), p. 750. For evidence that liberal commentators drew the comparison between Nixon's statement and the Court's subsequent opinion, see Horace Barker, *The Federal Retreat in School Desegregation* (Southern Regional Council, 1969), p. 68 & Leon Panetta, *Bring Us Together* (J.P. Lippincott Company, 1971), p. 272.

from the *Wall Street Journal* that ‘there is no national commitment to school desegregation any more...Six months of the Nixon administration hasn't destroyed the momentum, but it has done a lot to slow it down.’ A year later, Ruby Martin, former head of HEW’s Office for Civil Rights under Johnson, even hyperbolically claimed that Secretary Finch’s eighteen-month tenure at HEW constituted ‘the greatest give-away of human rights and civil rights in recent memory.’³

Just days before the Administration released their revised statement on school desegregation guidelines on July 3, 1969, thirty prominent activists from across the South travelled up to Washington D.C. by bus to present their opposition to the rumoured new policies. Quietly filling John Mitchell’s outer office on the fifth floor of the Justice Department, the group insisted they would not leave until they had spoken with the Attorney General. Rather fittingly, Mitchell was on Capitol Hill testifying for a weakening of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Whilst they awaited his return, the activists took turns to address an empty chair labelled ‘John Mitchell’ with their grievances. One Alabamian parent described how, ‘Our children are spat on. Our children are called ugly names. They have been slapped, been put in jails. Homes have been burned. All because our children wanted a decent education...we ask you to do your duty.’ When Jerris Leonard, the assistant attorney general for civil rights, arrived to complain that the group was disrupting Justice Department work, one vocal South Carolinian activist shot back, ‘Mr Leonard, do you know what *fair* is?’⁴

After Attorney General Mitchell finally arrived to converse with the group, he failed to respond to their pleas with assurances that the guidelines would be retained. Instead, the Administration’s chief law enforcement officer insisted that, on matters of civil rights, they ‘would be better advised to watch what we do rather than listen to what we say.’ In short, conservative rhetoric would be buttressed by liberal deeds. The activists were not impressed. On the bus trip north they had sung, ‘Leaning on the Everlasting Arms.’ Returning back home from their meeting with Mitchell, the chosen refrain had changed to ‘Tell old Nixon time is windin’ up /

³ Neil Maxwell ‘Federal Retreat: Nixon's Policies Allowing Resistance and Evasion’, *Wall Street Journal* (August 24, 1969), reprinted in *South Today*, Vol. 1 No. 4 (October 1969), p. 7; Ruby Martin, ‘The Nixon Administration,’ p. 55.

⁴ Pat Watters, ‘Our children are spat on’, *South Today* (July 1969), pp. 1-7.

Destruction is in this land / God's gonna move His Hand / Time is windin' up.'⁵

President Nixon shunned the moral commitment to racial equality of his two immediate predecessors. Instead, both Nixon and Mitchell indulged in rhetoric favoured by recalcitrant southern school boards and politicians: the language of 'all deliberate speed' in an era where the Supreme Court demanded of southern schools a desegregation 'plan that promises realistically to work, and promises realistically to work now.' It is this side of the Nixon Administration's civil rights policies that permeate the bulk of historical writing, creating the impression that the federal government was hijacked in January 1969 by a coterie of political hacks who set about implementing a reactionary, segregationist agenda.⁶

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate that such words constituted a poor substitute for the reform demanded by the white southerners whom Nixon had courted during his presidential campaign. Rhetoric aside, at every twist and turn the Nixon Administration largely failed to make substantive alterations to the trajectory of the movement towards black equality. As a result, civil rights supporters were not the only party angered by Nixon's stand on black equality. The new President did not seek to overturn Johnson's 'promise of solutions by means of federal programs,' but instead infuse civil rights policy with a realism and coolness of action. As Nixon instructed his Cabinet, 'Don't promise more than we can do. But do more than we can promise.' This applied to both sides of the civil rights debate.⁷

The formula anticipated Mitchell's infamous 'watch what we do' remark, as well as the prospect of disillusioning key southern supporters. Whilst the White House adopted southern-friendly rhetoric and promises, the executive branch's enforcement of civil rights mandates did not substantially alter from the

⁵ Pat Watters, 'Our children are spat on'; M. Hayes Mizell, 'The Impact of the Civil Rights Movement on a White Activist,' Unpublished paper presented at the annual meeting of the Southern Historical Association, Fort Worth, Texas (November 4, 1999), and accessed from <http://www.middleweb.com>;

⁶ Dean Kotlowski, *Nixon's Civil Rights: Politics, Principle, and Policy* (Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 156; *Green v. County School Board*, 391 U.S. 430, 440 (1968). For the most extreme and extended examples of this type of historical analysis, see Kenneth O' Reilly, *Nixon's Piano* (The Free Press, 1995) & Dan Carter, *The Politics of Rage* (Simon & Schuster, 1995).

⁷ Richard Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (Sidgwick & Jackson, 1978), p. 353.

Johnson years. As a result, Nixon's conservative opponents enjoyed ample ammunition to puncture the southern strategy narrative. George Wallace quickly capitalised on press reports of the Attorney General's quixotic phrase: insisting that it, 'clearly defines the hypocritical policy of the Nixon Administration on schools.' Ernest Hollings, the Democratic junior Senator from South Carolina, wryly observed that the White House's principal aim 'seems to be to convince the South that there is a Southern Strategy while convincing everyone else that there is not.'⁸

An Immediate Tempering of Expectations

Having held such high hopes for the Nixon presidency, white South Carolinians quickly drew similar conclusions. A mere month after Inauguration Day, columnist Don Oberdorfer reported that back home, 'political opponents and respected commentators alike are snickering that Ole' Strom was took.' The state's Republican boosters were rather less amused. In contrast to the 'abiding suspicion' amongst non-southerners that Thurmond exerted worrying influence within the fledgling White House, South Carolina's white conservatives began to suspect the opposite. Days before Oberdorfer's column appeared in the *Washington Post*, a prominent Republican attorney from Charleston, S.C. wrote of his severe displeasure and disappointment to Winston Blount, the only southerner in Nixon's Cabinet. Complaining that 'once again the South is to be the whipping boy,' the former state senator warned darkly of electoral reprisals.

The South Carolina media, so supportive of Nixon's candidacy a few months earlier, evinced similar concerns. Hugh Gibson, the dean of state journalists, wrote in Charleston's *News & Courier* to warn of 'breakers ahead,' and observe that the Nixon Administration had violated campaign promises within a matter of weeks in office. Forwarding these critiques to John Mitchell, a key proponent of the southern strategy during the election, Harry Dent wrote despairingly that GOP membership pledges were being cancelled

⁸ 'Nixon Administration Says One Thing But Does Another On "Busing" Issue', *The George C. Wallace Newsletter* (October 1969), 'Wallace Newsletters (October - December, 1969)', Folder 101, Box 4, Dent Papers; Harrel R. Rodgers & Charles S. Bullock III, *Law & Social Change* (McGraw-Hill, 1972), p. 92.

throughout the region, and pleaded for an audience with the President to convey his concerns.⁹

Dent's fears were well founded. In mid-February 1969, one married southern couple who had both voted for Nixon at the Miami Republican Convention wrote to 'beg' that the fledgling President reverse his Administration's 'opposition to freedom of choice' desegregation plans. Disillusionment pervaded the letter, as the authors bitterly recalled that they were among the delegates 'who strongly supported and cheered your nomination, not only because Strom Thurmond did, but because we believed in you.' Another South Carolinian dismayed by HEW's plans for his local school district put the case more succinctly: 'they are NOT what President Nixon advocated for his campaign in S.C.' Years of dedication to building Republicanism in the South appeared to be vanishing before Dent's eyes. A golden opportunity to buttress the GOP's emerging strength in states like South Carolina, Florida and Texas seemed squandered by the continuation of those policies that Nixon himself had explicitly criticised during the campaign.¹⁰

This expectation gap was not simply a figment of paranoid southern Republican imagination. John Ehrlichman, Nixon's chief domestic aide, later recalled of the 1968 campaign that, 'a lot of people that year, even his opponents, saw in him what they wanted, even if what they wanted was very different.' After the essential role played by Thurmond and Dent securing vital electoral votes for the Republican candidate's narrow triumph, speculation abounded about the role the white South would play in the Nixon Administration. In terms of patronage, the duo were well-rewarded. Thurmond received more federal appointments than any other U.S. Senator, whilst Dent was installed as a White House advisor charged with 'keeping a wide-open Southern eye on every single action the administration was to take.'¹¹

⁹ Don Oberdorfer, 'Framed Tribute From Nixon May Be All Thurmond Won', *Washington Post* (February 20, 1969); Huger Sinkler to Winston Blount (February 10, 1969) & Hugh Gibson, 'Breakers Ahead', *News & Courier* (February 16, 1969): both contained alongside Dent's own comments in Harry Dent to John Mitchell, 'Southern Political Demise' (February 19, 1969), '1969 Southern GOP (3 of 3)', Box 8, Harry Dent Files, NARA.

¹⁰ Jerry M. Hughes to Richard Nixon (February 11, 1969), Box 11, Executive, HU Subject Files, WHCF, NARA; U.C. Tomlinson to Harry Dent (May 15, 1969), 'HU 2-1 / ST 40 Education Schooling / South Carolina / Beginning - 12/31/1970', Box 15, HU Subject Files, WHCF, NARA.

¹¹ Roger Morris, 'The President Behind the Mask,' *New York Times* (February 4, 2009); Drew Pearson & Jack Anderson, 'Thurmond Urging Textile Curbs', *Washington Post* (February 26, 1969); Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, *Nixon in the White House* (Davis-Poynter, 1972), p. 145.

Once in office, Nixon largely shunned the southern Republicans so crucial to his nomination and election. As late as June 1970, GOP chairmen from the region still angrily awaited their first joint invitation to the White House. By that point, no less a figure than Strom Thurmond had only been granted a single private meeting with the President, and complained that it took three days for him to even see the Attorney General. In August 1970, Senator Barry Goldwater reminded Nixon that he had not seen the President privately for almost an entire year, and joked that the Coast Guard would not let him within three miles of the President's home in San Clemente.¹²

The Problem of Patronage

Senator Thurmond apart, the Nixon Administration even largely failed to fulfil traditional obligations of patronage to southern Republicans. Instead, it chose to court their Democratic counterparts in Congress, who wielded significantly more power. In April 1969, Peter Flanigan, the White House's coordinator on appointments, endured 'an endless litany of complaints' about patronage from a furious Louie Nunn, Republican Governor from Kentucky, whilst attending a funeral. On May 9, 1969, Harry Dent composed a list detailing the state of Republican patronage in the South that provoked a concerned President Nixon to order 'recommendations on what course of action might be taken to remedy the situation.' The request was disingenuous, since the White House had actually chosen to use the power of appointments as a means of courting powerful southern Democrats in Congress rather than rewarding faithful party loyalists. As Bryce Harlow admitted to unhappy southern Republican leaders in February, legislative exigencies meant that 'situations may arise when (state recommendations) will have to be finessed.'¹³

¹² Hugh Sloan to John Ehrlichman, 'Clarke Reed' (June 22, 1970), '(CF) PL Political Affairs: 5-1-70 to (12-21-70) (1969-70),' Box 46, White House Confidential Files: 1969-1974, NARA; Harry Dent, 'Report on Meeting of Southerners and Other Conservatives with the President, Thursday, August 6, 1970 during the period 5:20 PM - 7:30 PM' (August 6, 1970), 'Beginning August 2, 1970', Box 81, President's Office Files, NARA.

¹³ Harry Dent to Harry Fleming & Fred La Rue (April 3, 1969), '1969 Southern GOP (1 of 3),' Dent Files, WHSF, NARA; Fred LaRue to Bryce Harlow, 'Southern State Chairmen's Meeting: Statler-Hilton Hotel, February 17, 1969' (February 19, 1969), '(CF) HU 2-1 (Education - Schooling) 1/20/69 - 2/28/70 (1969-70)', Subject Files: Confidential Files, 1969-1974, WHSF, NARA.

Mississippi Republicans were particularly ‘finessed’ with regards to patronage assignments. Despite boasting the most influential southern Republican Party chairman in Clarke Reed, the legislative power held by John Stennis and James Eastland through their Senate committee assignments ensured that, as late as May 1969, the Nixon Administration had bestowed patronage exclusively towards the state’s Democrats. Even low-level federal jobs in Washington D.C. were funnelled to Stennis or Eastland recommendations. Howard Callaway, a prominent Georgian Republican, later described the party’s treatment in Mississippi as ‘shameful.’ A similar situation existed in North Carolina, Tennessee, and Florida, infuriating local Republican officials convinced that Nixon had promised patronage in return for their support during the campaign.¹⁴

Given that the Nixon Administration faced a Democratic Congress, the prioritisation of political expediency over party-building down South is perhaps unsurprising. As Richard Nixon himself observed in his memoirs, ‘I came to depend on a group of southern Democrats’ for support in foreign policy affairs. What does upset the historical record is the extent to which the President refused to openly consort with the same GOP state leaders he had desperately courted less than nine months earlier. In the run-up to a crucial showdown between Administration representatives and irate southern Republican leaders in mid-February 1969, H.R. Haldeman even ordered the location be changed from the White House to a local hotel for the purposes of ‘security.’ It is likely that Nixon’s Chief of Staff feared the public-relations consequences should details of the meeting be leaked. As a result, southern leaders liaised with low-level White House officials from the confines of an anonymous hotel at the time the media was portraying the White House as ‘Uncle Strom’s Cabin.’¹⁵

For Nixon’s southern strategists and Dixie Republicans alike, the situation rankled. Harry Dent was not alone in questioning why the President met those who had ‘fought him’ during the election, such as the NAACP

¹⁴ Howard Callaway to Harry Dent (July 29, 1970), ‘1969 Southern GOP (2 of 3)’, Box 8, Dent Files; Harry Dent to Spiro Agnew (March 7, 1969), ‘1969 Southern GOP (3 of 3)’, Box 8, Dent Files.

¹⁵ Richard Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (Sidgwick & Jackson, 1978), p. 351; Harry Dent to Bryce Harlow (February 14, 1969), ‘1969 Southern GOP (3 of 3)’, Box 8, Dent Files.

grandee Roy Wilkins, whilst simultaneously shunning partisan loyalists. The first eighteen months of Nixon's Presidency left southern Republicans convinced that 'the squeaky wheel gets the grease.' In July 1970, for example, state chairmen from Dixie bitterly complained that 'we've been good guys too long and have gotten nothing but rhetoric while the bad guys have been in the streets getting all the attention and action.'¹⁶

The School Desegregation Imbroglio

The Administration faced even tougher criticism from the same quarters on school desegregation. Just a few months into the Nixon Presidency, South Carolina's Chief School Superintendent, Cyril Busbee, observed that local school boards in the Palmetto State found HEW's letters 'nicer in tone, but basically say the same thing.' This impressionistic evidence quickly spread to and outraged South Carolina Republicans. On February 13, 'southern fever' gripped a state executive committee meeting, as even 'liberal' Republican members vented their dissatisfaction with the continuation of Johnsonian policy on schools. According to Harry Dent, only the timely intervention of an anonymous 'very influential leader' dissuaded the assembled contingent of dissatisfied party officials from passing a resolution 'telling the President to stick by his campaign promises.'¹⁷

Worse was to follow. Plunged into 'the depths of despair,' southern Republican state chairmen seized on the opportunity of a meeting with White House officials on February 17, 1969, to unleash 'the full blast' on Administration policy. A sample of the anger on display at the meeting is provided by a letter composed by Ray Harris, chairman of the South Carolina GOP, a week later. In it, he raged to a fellow party member that southern Republicans need not concern themselves with the black vote any longer: 'with the way the

¹⁶ Harry Dent to Richard Nixon (July 21, 1969), 'Southern GOP (January - August, 1970)', Box 7, Dent Papers.

¹⁷ Herbert H. Denton, 'Rights Leaders Press HEW To Clarify Guideline Policy', *Washington Post* (March 25, 1969); Harry Dent to Bryce Harlow (February 14, 1969), '1969 Southern GOP (3 of 3)', Box 8, Dent Files.

Administration is going, we're stuck with all of it' combined with 'about 10% of the white vote.' The same day, a cartoon published in the *Providence Evening Bulletin* showed Strom Thurmond, flanked by an angry parent and child, on the telephone asking to speak to 'the old Nixon.'¹⁸

Following Haldeman's request for anonymity, the showdown between Administration representatives and southern Republican party leaders was convened at the Statler-Hilton Hotel, situated a half-mile north of the White House. As the most senior southerner in Nixon's team, Bryce Harlow was awarded the unenviable task of placating a group convinced that the President's 'commitments are not being honoured.' Jim Holhouser, state chairman of North Carolina, referred back to Nixon's television interview in his state during the campaign, whilst the chairman from Texas recapitulated promises made by Nixon to bring in Republicans at the second and third tier of government. That the latter evinced such discontent was particularly significant, since Pete O'Donnell had been part of Nixon's inner circle as early as 1967. Despite his personal ties to Nixon, O'Donnell's defection to the ranks of disgruntled southern leaders was understandable: the assembled contingent unanimously agreed that the Nixon Administration would not carry a single southern state in 1972 with their current school desegregation policy.¹⁹

In response, the White House mobilised John Mitchell and Spiro Agnew, an increasingly popular figure amongst southern Republicans, to provide reassurance that the Administration had been only temporarily frustrated in its efforts to realign school desegregation policies with Nixon's campaign pledges. Although the Attorney General and Vice President's words soothed frayed southern tempers, the perpetuation of Johnsonian policy on schools began to erode the Nixon Administration's reputation down South. For Harry Dent, the situation was particularly troublesome. If Dent could not keep his fellow southerners in line, then

¹⁸ Dent to Harlow (February 19, 1969) & Harry Dent to John Mitchell, 'Southern Political Demise' (February 19, 1969), both in '1969 Southern GOP (3 of 3), Box 8, Dent Files; Ray Harris to James E. Duffy (February 25, 1969), 'Gen '69', General, Box 2, South Carolina GOP Papers; Cartoon entitled 'Hello I'd Like to Speak to the Old Nixon', *Providence Evening News* (February 17, 1969), 'Cartoons', Thurmond Papers. On the relative importance attached by southern Republican leaders to patronage and school desegregation policy, see Harry Dent to Bryce Harlow (February 19, 1969), '1969 Southern GOP (3 of 3), Box 8, Dent Files.

¹⁹ Fred LaRue to Bryce Harlow, 'Southern State Chairmen's Meeting: Statler-Hilton Hotel, February 17, 1969 (February 19, 1969), (CF) HU 2-1 (Education - Schooling) 1/20/69 - 2/28/70 (1969-70), Subject Files: Confidential Files, 1969-1974, WHSF, NARA; William Safire, *Before the Fall* (Transaction Press, 2005), pp. 42-3.

his White House role as regional liaison would be fatally compromised.²⁰

Harry Dent struggles to satisfy southern Republican demands

Accordingly, from early February 1969 onwards Dent began to send southern Republican leaders encouraging press releases and policy decisions on plain letterhead 'to keep the troops from panicking.' The brief explanatory cover-notes were rather hopefully signed 'Robert E. Lee'. Nixon's sporadic outbursts of frustration about hardline civil rights enforcement suggested that Dent's crusade had quickly secured devastating victory against the opposition. On March 27, 'Robert E. Lee' dashed off a short note to southern leaders that began, 'Bob, I want them (the guidelines) relaxed in a direct, forthright manner': a verbatim quotation from Nixon to HEW Secretary Robert Finch ordering the reform of school guidelines so desired by white southerners. In succinct and unreservedly joyful tones, Dent proclaimed underneath, 'GOOD NEWS...The word has been passed down the line to relax the situation at HEW.'²¹

Southern Republican leaders rightly treated such displays of optimistic triumphalism with scepticism. For all Dent's public relations efforts, their expectations that the Nixon Administration could purge the perceived excesses of civil rights reform remained dashed. As early as February 4, one disgruntled chairman wrote to the White House with clippings of Nixon's school desegregation statement in Charlotte during the campaign. Dixie Republicans soon learned that reassuring rhetoric meant little in a bureaucratic environment dominated by regulations and legal precedent, and enforced by civil rights sympathisers. As Strom Thurmond lamented in a private meeting with Nixon and other senior southern Republicans, 'every time he talks to the President he is encouraged but when he leaves, he gets very discouraged based on the lack of execution of the

²⁰ Harry Dent to Richard Nixon (March 5, 1969), '1969 Southern GOP (3 of 3)', Box 8, Dent Files.

²¹ Harry Dent to John Ehrlichman et al (February 7, 1969), Unsigned memo (March 27, 1969) & memo signed 'General Robert E. Lee' (c. late March 1969), all from '1969 Southern GOP (3 of 3)', Box 8, Dent Files. Responding to a charge made by liberal Senators that Finch was under White House pressure to relax the guidelines 'in a furtive and quiet manner,' Nixon ordered Alexander Butterfield to instruct the HEW Secretary that they be 'relaxed in a direct, forthright manner.': see Alexander P. Butterfield to Robert Finch (March 26, 1969), '105 closed (desegregation) (2 of 2),' Box 34, Ehrlichman Files, NARA.

President's orders by others in the Administration.'²²

Accordingly, southern GOP officials quickly learned to treat even the most enticing official statements with extreme caution. In early March 1969, Secretary Finch gave an interview on school desegregation to the conservative *U.S. and News World Report*, during which he controversially prevaricated on the legal justification for pursuing effective integration. One disillusioned Administration official later wrote despairingly that Finch's 'answers were replete with all the segregationists' arguments against school desegregation,' and pointedly observed that the conservative Republican Senator from Texas, John Tower, was so pleased with the content that he inserted the piece into the *Congressional Record*. Even Strom Thurmond pronounced himself 'delighted' with it. With new hopes of achieving a reprieve from genuine desegregation, southern school officials negotiating with HEW took to placing a copy of the interview in full view of departmental officials.²³

Wiser heads down South were more cynical. Disillusionment with the gap between campaign rhetoric and presidential action had gripped southern Republican officials beyond the point of being alleviated by a single positive interview. When Harry Dent arranged for 42,000 copies of the article in question to be distributed to southern GOP chairmen and Capitol Hill insiders for circulation across the region, Clarke Reed strongly disagreed with such hubristic action. Instead, Reed optimistically suggested that new guidelines be released relaxing the standards necessary for compliance with federal mandates.²⁴

Clarke Reed and his political allies were right to treat Finch's careless words with caution. The Secretary did not understand that the school desegregation discourse had become heavily coded to the point that apparently

²² G. Paul Jones to Harry Dent, (February 4, 1969), 'South Carolina Politics' (April - December, 1969), Folder 84, Box 3, Harry Dent Papers, Clemson; Harry Dent, 'Report on Meeting of Southerners and Other Conservatives with the President, Thursday, August 6, 1970 during the period 5:20 PM - 7:30 PM' (August 6, 1970), 'Beginning August 2, 1970', Box 81, President's Office Files, NARA.

²³ Leon Panetta, *Bring Us Together*, pp. 102-3.

²⁴ Harry Dent to John Sears (March 27, 1969) & Clarke Reed to attendees at Southern Republican State Chairmen's meeting, March 10, 1969 (c. March 1969): both in '1969 Southern GOP (3 of 3)', Box 8, Dent Files.

neutral pronouncements could be wrongly interpreted as evidence of an Administration slowdown. As a senior civil rights official later observed of the interview, white southerners wrongly construed ‘we’re reviewing the guidelines now’ to mean that ‘the guidelines would be changed’; whilst ‘you can’t do it with a sledge hammer, and you can’t do it overnight...meant more time to desegregate.’²⁵

Just six days after publication of the *U.S. News and World Report* article, the Secretary personally assured representatives from the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights that ‘the guidelines would not be rewritten or evaded.’ Such implicitly contradictory statements were common. In an April 1969 meeting with HEW officials, Finch could both insist that ‘Line is: We are not changing guidelines,’ and ‘we want to play role of educators & not cops.’ The two points were incompatible. By continuing enforcement of the guidelines, Finch inevitably authorised the policing of southern schools by federal bureaucrats. The unhappy mixture of an ingratiating personality and desire to chart an impossible course between segregationists and integrationists ensured that Secretary Finch soon became highly mistrusted by all parties to the cause.²⁶

As months passed with no sign of reform, impatient southern Republicans began to label the White House’s southern strategist ‘next week Dent.’ Aware that his new moniker was unlikely to be altered by rhetoric alone, Harry Dent desperately tried to demonstrate material change in civil rights enforcement. One detailed report to concerned southern Republicans from ‘Robert E. Lee’ insisted that their complaints had been aired ‘at the highest level,’ and that an internal political committee had recently urged immediate action on the school and patronage questions. Evidencing a very southern sense of theatre, Dent ordered all recipients to digest the memo’s contents and then destroy it. The documentary evidence contained within was less combustible: a *Washington Post* clipping evidencing civil rights organisations’ disquiet with Administration policy and the appointment of the ultraconservative Arizonan, Robert Mardian, as HEW General Counsel.²⁷

²⁵ Leon Panetta, *Bring Us Together*, p. 102.

²⁶ Patrick Gray’s notes from HEW meeting on civil rights (April 16, 1969), ‘Civil Rights: 1969, April’, Box 1, Personal Papers, Finch Collection, Nixon Library.

²⁷ Memo signed ‘General Robert E. Lee’ (c. late March 1969), ‘1969 Southern GOP (3 of 3)’, Box 8, Dent Files. Evidence of Dent’s ‘next week’ nickname is found in Clarke Reed to Harry Dent (July 4, 1969), ‘1969 Southern GOP (2 of 3)’, Box 8, Dent Files.

Executive branch resistance to the Southern Strategy

These were weak boasts, and evidenced a shift in efforts to fulfil the southern strategy. As the Nixon Administration realised the complexity of reconstructing federal desegregation policies and the intensity of southern impatience, so it indulged in symbolic reassurance rather than substantive promises. Responding to an angry missive on the school issue from Ray Harris, South Carolina GOP chairman, Bryce Harlow plaintively replied, ‘just, please, believe that I and a host of others here are doing our level best to get a solution that can float, and I have growing hopes that we will.’ Relying on faith alone was a weak strategy indeed. Even Harry Dent struggled to satisfy his southern constituency with adequate proof that the Nixon Administration had changed anything other than the rhetoric accompanying civil rights enforcement. The *Washington Post* clipping was a case in point. After all, civil rights groups had openly griped about Presidents with far grander visions of reform than Richard Nixon. By the same token, incoming administrators could do little to expedite the change demanded by unhappy white southerners. When the newly-appointed Mardian suggested that the department secretly relax school desegregation standards, disgusted HEW officials quickly torpedoed the proposal by leaking it to the press.²⁸

Federal bureaucrats were a serious bottleneck in the Nixon White House's desire to demonstrate their success mitigating hardline civil rights enforcement. Departmental personnel were instilled with a strong and clearly defined sense of ‘organizational mission,’ whereby the agency served as a tool to improve the condition of the underprivileged; a mission that could not be easily derailed. At one HEW branch in Rockville, Maryland, reformist bureaucrats responded to the Nixon Presidency by forming a Minority Concerns Commission, which produced a newsletter ‘that startled some officials with its bold, black unity symbols.’ Some bureaucrats held acute vendettas against the new President: one HEW official was reassigned away from the department after reportedly using Nixon’s picture as a dartboard. These anecdotes were buttressed by quantitative data. A comprehensive survey conducted early in the Nixon presidency found that HEW

²⁸ Bryce Harlow to Ray Harris (May 16, 1969), ‘40, South Carolina (1969-73)’, States and Territories Files, Nixon White House Files, NARA; Panetta, *Bring Us Together*, pp. 110-111.

represented only the most extreme example of endemic bureaucratic antagonism towards Nixon and his efforts to scale back Great Society programmes.²⁹

Such resistance infuriated southern strategists like Harry Dent, who believed without question that the federal executive should exhibit total loyalty to the President. A partisan street-fighter hardened by bruising encounters with an entrenched Democratic Party apparatus in South Carolina, Dent assumed that his role in the White House should replicate his former duties as state GOP chairman.³⁰ Enjoying executive power where before he had none, Dent desperately sought to purge the bureaucracy of those he believed worked against the South and the region's devotion to 'traditional' values. Such fierce partisanship occasionally lurched towards quasi-authoritarian rancour. In March 1969, Dent warned Vice President Agnew that a state department employee 'has been making disparaging comments about you,' and added with uncharacteristic menace, 'if you want any more information or action taken with regard to silencing (the individual concerned), please let me know.'³¹

Assessing his duties in an October 1969 memo to the Oval Office, Dent reported one of his principal functions as the requirement to 'instil and maintain political loyalty and allegiance to the president and his will in all departments and agencies.' Having witnessed the practice first-hand in his native South Carolina, Dent truly believed that politics and government were inseparable. As he wrote despairingly in a May 1970 memo, 'My voice has been heard on this MANY times, but I have not prevailed as much as I should have. To me loyalty comes first in this game & then merit & ability & NOT VICE VERSA.' Others agreed with Dent.

²⁹ Denton, 'Rights Leaders Press HEW'; 'Blacks in HEW Form Caucus', *Race Reporter* (Oct. 18, 1971), 'Race Relations Reporter', Folders 36-38, Box 10, Joseph B. Cummings Papers, Emory University; Mike Causey, 'Officials May Move Against Protests', *The Washington Post* (August 3, 1970); Joel D. Aberbach & Bert A. Rockman, 'Clashing Beliefs Within the Executive Branch', *The American Political Science Review* Vol. 70 No. 2 (June, 1976), p. 466. Aberbach and Rockman carried out interviews with 126 administrators from 18 different federal agencies in the D.C. area during 1970.

³⁰ For evidence that Dent's White House duties replicated those he performed as S.C. GOP Chairman, see: Lee Bandy, 'South Carolinians Key (To) Nixon Administration', *The State and Columbia Record* (July 27, 1969), 'Clippings' (July - December 1969), Folder 16, Box 1, Dent Papers; Harry S. Dent to Spiro Agnew (March 6, 1969), 'Memos to the Vice President (March, 1969)', Box 2, Dent Papers.

³¹ Harry S. Dent to Spiro Agnew (March 6, 1969), 'Memos to the Vice President' (March, 1969), Folder 47, Box 2, Dent Papers.

On his arrival in the White House in January 1970, Nixon's long-time associate³² Murray Chotiner was similarly horrified to discover that Administration appointments were rarely vetted for political loyalty. He consequently asked Haldeman for the 'authority to tell the facts of life' with Dent to those appointees who entertained grandiose notions of non-partisan 'statesmanship.'³³

No federal department was loathed more by Harry Dent and his native Southland than Health, Education and Welfare: the 'most suspect branch of the national government in Washington.'³⁴ Even President Nixon himself lamented the department's 'miserable collection of bureaucrats - some disloyal, some incompetent.' The department certainly caused serious headaches for the Nixon White House. In May 1969, Vice President Agnew pointedly wrote to President Nixon observing that southern Republican Senators were exceptionally dissatisfied with 'the apparent direction of HEW policy.' A fortnight later, Agnew received a handwritten missive from Robert Byrd angrily denouncing Secretary Finch, whom the Democratic Senator from West Virginia accused of 'hustling the President and the country.' In a confidential memo to Harry Dent forwarding Byrd's complaint, Agnew bemoaned 'the vacuous and ultra-liberal utterances from H.E.W.' that caused the Administration to appear 'schizophrenic' on civil rights issues.³⁵

'The Unmanageable Job': Robert Finch as HEW Secretary

³² During the Checkers imbroglio, Nixon had dictated a telegram to Eisenhower withdrawing from the 1952 Republican presidential ticket. Chotiner ripped it up. See Elizabeth B. Drew, 'The White House Hard Hats', *The Atlantic* (October 1970), pp. 51-57.

³³ Kenneth Cole to Harry Dent, 'Clark Mollenhoff's memo to the President' (March 2, 1970), 'Memos to Staff Secretary (June - December 1969)' Box 2, Dent Papers; Murray Chotiner to H.R. Haldeman (March 6, 1970), '1970 Memos to Haldeman', Box 3, Dent Files.

³⁴ Dent's suspicions were apparently confirmed by reports that appeared in southern newspapers concerning HEW's May Day celebrations in 1971, when the 'spineless' department allowed 'hard-core radicals to use HEW facilities for pro-Hanoi propaganda purposes.': see Harry Dent to Elliot Richardson (June 23, 1971), 'HEW (April - September, 1971)', Box 9, Dent Papers.

³⁵ Harry Dent to John Ehrlichman, Elliot Richardson & George Shultz, 'Cabinet Committee on Education' (April 16, 1971), 'School Compliance (April - November, 1971)', Box 10, Dent Papers; Untitled Meeting Notes beginning '11-11-70 / 10.25 AM - Secy Richardson, Finch, Shultz, Morgan, E', 'JDE Notes of Meetings with the President / 7/1/70 - 12/31/70 (5 of 8)', Box 4, Ehrlichman Files; Spiro Agnew to Richard Nixon (May 16, 1969), 'President's Handwriting: May 1969', Box 2, President's Office Files; Spiro Agnew to Harry Dent (May 29, 1969), Cabinet Memos (May-July, 1969)', Box 1, Dent Papers.

As Dent and Agnew feared, southern critics eagerly seized on the credibility gap that existed between White House rhetoric and HEW policy. As during the campaign, George Wallace led the charge. Writing in a December 1969 newsletter to supporters, Wallace observed that, 'The President apparently talks for the benefit of the South and his political future whilst those in his administration act out a role not in keeping with his stated policies. This "say one thing but do another policy" can be seen in other areas of administration action, especially in the schools.' Wallace made his point effectively. Realising that Nixon appeared pro-South, he did not question the President's desire to dilute civil rights policies. Instead, the Alabamian argued that the Nixon Administration did not possess the strength of will to defeat a hostile bureaucracy. In June 1970, Wallace responded to Finch's resignation from HEW by recalling a photograph taken in the Californian's office of 'an insolent interloper lolling back in the secretary's chair, his feet propped up on the secretary's desk, with Mr. Finch sitting elsewhere.' The impression was of a Cabinet Secretary whose lack of moral fibre and weakness of personality rendered him liable to be held captive by his department's left-wing constituency, and consequently act 'adversely to the President's policies.'³⁶

Although such allegations were unfair, this particular image was broadly representative of the Secretary's indulgence in consensus politics. Torn between the Administration's 'schizophrenic' desire to simultaneously fulfil its commitment to southern interest groups and observe Supreme Court rulings mandating genuine school desegregation, Finch's pliant public persona infuriated politicians and administrators of all ideological stripes. In a private meeting with Nixon after Finch's resignation from HEW, Senator Thurmond accurately castigated the former Secretary 'as a man who talks one way when he is with [me] and another way when he is with someone on the other side of the question.' One Georgian congressman who boasted close ties to the Nixon White House openly called for Robert Finch's impeachment. By the end of his cabinet tenure, Finch had become detested in South Carolina. On receiving word of his departure, a couple from Norway, South Carolina, wrote to Nixon proclaiming 'Glory be to God in the Highest. We hope and pray his replacement will treat parents and children like human beings. If Finch is to be one of your special White House advisors,

³⁶ 'Nixon Administration Says One Thing But Does Another On "Busing" Issue', *The George C. Wallace Newsletter* Vol. 1, No. 8 (October 1969), 'Wallace Newsletters' (October - December, 1969), 'Wallace Newsletters (October - December, 1969)', Box 4, Dent Papers; 'Finch's Directives Contrary to President's Promises' *The George C. Wallace Newsletter* (June, 1970), 'Wallace News (April - November, 1970)', Box 7, Dent Papers.

God pity the United States.’³⁷

Critics lamented Finch's apparent inability to reign in his idealistic underlings at HEW. In April 1969, Mississippi Representative William Colmer and Senator John Tower angrily accosted Bryce Harlow with evidence that departmental officials had insisted to local school officials that ‘you must have interracial dating.’ Whether meritorious or not, the claims reflected a widespread sense amongst white conservatives that Secretary Finch had failed to gain any measure of control over his staff at HEW. Even Finch himself recognised the headstrong idealism that permeated his department. Addressing the National Press Club in mid-January 1970, the Secretary wryly observed of the previous Sunday night’s Superbowl between the Minnesota Vikings and the Kansas City Chiefs that ‘the only time I have seen better end around plays were some of the agencies in my own Department.’³⁸

Unfortunately for Secretary Finch, liberals viewed him just as negatively. The same month that Byrd and Agnew vented their dissatisfaction with the ‘apparent direction’ of HEW policy, Leon Panetta, Finch’s chief civil rights enforcer, confidentially told a *Washington Post* reporter that the Secretary was under pressure ‘from Thurmond, from Tower, from all the Southern Republican state chairmen, from Dent in the White House. Finch is a political person and all the political pressure’s coming from one side now.’ By the time the White House had reached the decision to replace Robert Finch with a hard-headed moderate, Elliot Richardson, the hapless Finch had managed to alienate virtually his entire department. When he left HEW, under-Secretary Jack Veneman tactfully observed in a phone call to Richardson that ‘everyone had respect for the Secretary [Finch], but are gratified that the President made this decision...We are going to keep [civil rights programs] rolling.’³⁹

³⁷ Harry Dent, ‘Report on Meeting of Southerners and Other Conservatives with the President, Thursday, August 6, 1970 during the period 5:20 PM - 7:30 PM’ (August 6, 1970), ‘Beginning August 2, 1970’ Box 81, President’s Office Files; Congressional testimony of Gary Orfield (September 25, 1969), Hearings, Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. Senate, 91st Cong., 1st Session (1969); Herman H. Dyches & Unnamed Wife to Richard Nixon (June 18, 1970), ‘Desegregation, Public Schools, General, n.d.’, Box 31, McNair Papers.

³⁸ Patrick Gray notes on meeting on civil rights (April 16, 1969), ‘Civil Rights: 1969, April’, Box 1, Personal, Finch Papers; Transcript of Press Conference with Secretary Robert H. Finch (January 13, 1970), ‘Address – Luncheon Meeting of the National Press Club, Washington D.C.’, Box 11, Personal, Finch Papers.

³⁹ Leon Panetta, *Bring Us Together* (J.P. Lippincott Company, 1971), p. 103-4; Transcript of an undated telephone

There can be little doubt that Finch lacked the cold calculation and steely persona required of a Cabinet Secretary presiding over such controversial programs as Title VI, and frequently left the impression of a weak-willed and vacillating administrator. Even when his authority was challenged by inferior officials, Finch failed to assert himself effectively.⁴⁰ As an outstanding vote-getter in Californian politics during the mid-1960s, Robert Finch had deployed an effective consensual style that blended better with a heterogeneous state electorate than his ticket-mate Ronald Reagan's divisive rhetoric. In December 1969, the conservative newspaper columnist Russell Kirk praised the incoming Secretary of HEW as 'a conservative possessed of creative imagination.'⁴¹

Unfortunately for Finch, his selection of HEW as the 'action' federal department ahead of the Vice Presidency was singularly ill-advised. School desegregation represented a zero-sum game between recalcitrant white southerners and impatient civil rights activists. The middle ground that Finch naturally sought to occupy simply did not exist. In mid-August 1969, the beleaguered HEW Secretary revealed his interest in running for the U.S. Senate, and even admitted that 'having done both the administrative and legislative side I would say that the legislative arena has an aura all of its own.' The job was seriously tough. On replacing Finch as HEW Secretary, Elliot Richardson was helpfully advised by a friend that his new position 'is about the most unmanageable job in Washington – Congratulations.'⁴²

School Desegregation Battles Begin

Oblivious to the obstacles he would soon encounter, Secretary Finch began his tenure at HEW intent on

conversation between Elliott Richardson and Jack Veneman, 'Telecons - June 1970', Box 127, Richardson Papers.

⁴⁰ For evidence of Finch's pliant character, see his response when Jerris Leonard, an assistant Attorney General, treated one of the Secretary's staff members with an appalling lack of courtesy in the Secretary's presence, a transcript of which can be found in 'Civil Rights: 1969, August 22: In-House Conf. Transcript', Box 2, Finch Papers.

⁴¹ Russell Kirk, 'Conservative With Imagination', *The State* (December 24, 1968).

⁴² Extract from recorded interview by WRC (NBC) radio reporter Betty Groebil (August 18, 1969), 'August 1969 - Interview / RHF with Betty Groebil for NBC Monitor', Box 5, Personal, Finch Papers; Transcript of a telephone conversation between Elliott Richardson and U. Alexis Johnson (June 7, 1970), 'Telecons - June 1970, Box 127, Richardson Papers.

rehabilitating his department's relationship with white southern officials alienated by the Johnson Administration's Title VI programme. On January 23, 1969, Cyril Busbee, South Carolina superintendent of schools, wrote to his close political ally Governor Robert McNair to observe a 'slightly different tone' in communications from HEW's Office for Civil Rights. The letter attached as evidence an official letter notifying southern school administrators that HEW was interested in finding out more about the 'human element' involved in school desegregation so that the department 'can improve the administration of our responsibilities in terms of the needs and problems that may exist.' Ostensibly a missive from one of HEW's regional offices, the language and concept bore the hallmarks of Secretary Finch and President Nixon's naïve belief that the southern school question could be resolved with the application of a more understanding approach.⁴³

February had not yet arrived when the Nixon Presidency found itself caught in the line of fire from below the Mason-Dixon line. Worried about 'the next Administration not picking up the ball,' in the final months of Lyndon Johnson's administration HEW fixed the compliance deadline for five chronically recalcitrant school districts in Mississippi and South Carolina to coincide with Nixon's twelfth day in office. Less than a fortnight after Inauguration Day, the fledgling Administration faced a difficult choice; a choice indicative of the future crises it would endure attempting to navigate a viable path between southern Republican demands and the potential alienation of centrist voters still evincing broad support for school desegregation in Dixie.⁴⁴

Prior to the cut-off decision, Harry Dent warned the Nixon White House that 'campaign statements concerning true freedom of choice' had created a worryingly over-inflated expectation amongst white southerners that 'there will be some change right away,' and suggested that the existing HEW guidelines be frozen pending further study aided by Dent's knowledge of the 'political considerations on this sensitive subject.' In short, the fund cut-offs be indefinitely postponed. Not for the last time, Dent was ignored. On

⁴³ Cyril B. Busbee to Robert McNair (January 23, 1969), 'Desegregation, Public Schools, General, 1969', Box 30, McNair Papers.

⁴⁴ Harold Howe II to Wilbur Cohen, Civil Rights Position Paper' (October 10, 1968), 'CR 5-1 Court Orders (Enforcement)', Box 345, RG12, NARA.

January 30, 1969, Secretary Finch announced that the terminations would proceed, albeit with the relevant funds to be reinstated in full to any school districts achieving compliance within sixty days. By withdrawing any financial penalty for delay during this period, the White House hoped to soften the impact of carrying out Title VI cut-offs just a matter of months after the President had denounced their use on the campaign trail. *Congressional Quarterly* also reported that a passage in Finch's statement reaffirming HEW's commitment to Nixon's pledges was included under direct orders from the Oval Office.⁴⁵

Unsurprisingly, those involved were rather more concerned with the loss of significant proportions of school financing than vague assurances of future reprieve. No 'crowing' editorials appeared in South Carolina newspapers after the announcement. The southern strategy had encountered the first of many troublesome roadblocks. According to a concerned memo sent by Harry Dent to congressional liaison Bryce Harlow, Senator Thurmond was 'furious' with the decision and angrily alleged 'absolutely no change' in HEW's approach to school desegregation since Nixon's election. Thurmond's rash promises of a 'better deal' under the incoming Republican Administration at the tail-end of 1968 now seemed hopelessly naïve. Sensing blood, prominent Democratic state legislators berated the Nixon Administration for cutting off funds to their home districts. The South Carolina localities involved, Abbeville and Barnwell counties, lost \$196,858 and \$294,153 respectively. As one experienced OCR official based in the Atlanta regional office confidentially explained to a *Newsweek* reporter, civil rights bureaucrats considered the decision 'more a plus than a minus.' Despite his rhetoric of appeasement, Finch had still cut off funds and insisted that the district meet current constitutional standards.⁴⁶

The fund terminations carved a deep hole in local school finances. For both South Carolina counties, federal

⁴⁵ 'Harry Dent to Richard Nixon, 'The Sensitive HEW Guidelines' (January 23, 1969), '105 closed (desegregation) (2 of 2)', Box 30, Ehrlichman Files; 'to: nation (goldman); from: atlanta/lubenow/1-31-69; re: hew fund cut' (January 31, 1969), 'School Desegregation', 'School Desegregation, 1954-1970', Box 11, Newsweek Collection; 'Nixon's School Desegregation Policies Remain Unclear', *Congressional Quarterly* (February 14, 1969), 'Civil Rights: 1969, Jan – Feb', Personal, Finch Papers.

⁴⁶ 'to: nation (goldman)' (January 31, 1969); Gareth Davies, *See Government Grow*, p. 119; 'Barnwell District is Denied Funds,' *The Barnwell People Sentinel* (February 6, 1969), 'Barnwell, S.C., Abbeville, S.C. 2/6/69', Folder 17, Box 2, Newsweek Collection; Leon Panetta to Robert Finch, 'Proposed Approach to School Desegregation Cases and Policy', 'Civil Rights: 1969, Jan – Feb', Box 1, Finch Papers.

funds constituted fully one-fifth of their entire annual budget. The consequences were bleak. Shortly before the funds were terminated, the Superintendent of Barnwell County's school district wrote bitterly to Senator Ernest Hollings warning that, 'unless something is done from a higher level we shall have to discontinue serving daily lunches and milks to approximately 700 students, medical care, dental care and clothing to approximately 500 students from low-income families (mostly Negro).' Nixon the candidate was right to observe that administrative sanctions often produced unintended consequences at odds with their objectives. It was bitterly ironic that a policy designed to aid the improvement of education for racial minorities could adversely impact on those students most heavily. Neither was it desirable that school desegregation plans were often designed by federal officials broadly unfamiliar with local circumstances.⁴⁷

Where Nixon and his advisors erred was to assume that these trying conditions had been unfairly imposed by power-hungry bureaucrats and arrogant northern politicians, as claimed by southern Republicans, when in reality they had only been imposed after the exhaustion of all methods of voluntary compliance. Similarly, it was hardly HEW's fault that southern school administrators cynically used federal aid to fund those programmes that disproportionately served minority students, so that any fund terminations would have little effect on the education of white children. As one Office of Education official lamented in January 1968, there existed 'an almost total absence of any standards or controls concerning the civil rights aspects of Title I.' Put simply, southern officials were hardly more sinned against than sinning.⁴⁸

It is not hard to see why Nixon thought otherwise. Typical of southern Republican thinking on the matter was a March 1969 memo sent by Harry Dent to the new President. 'The guidelines,' Dent complained in rhetoric stained with delusion, 'have been administered in some instances with an attitude of retaliation rather than

⁴⁷ Harry Dent to Richard Nixon, 'The Sensitive HEW Guidelines' (January 23, 1969), '105 closed (desegregation) (2 of 2),' Box 30, Ehrlichman Files; Leon Panetta to Robert Finch, 'Proposed Approach to School Desegregation Cases and Policy' (February 8, 1969), 'Civil Rights: 1969, Jan - Feb', Finch Papers; 'DPR Collect: Nation from cumming' (February 7, 1969), 'Barnwell, S.C., Abbeyville, S.C. 2/6/69', Folder 17, Box 2, Newsweek Collection; 'VUX Nation: Five Counties: From Cummings' (February 7, 1969) & 'to: nation (goldman); from: atlanta/lubenow/1-31-69; re: hew fund cut' (January 31, 1969), both in 'School Desegregation', School Deseg 1954-1970, Newsweek Collection; L.E. McLaurin to Ernest F. Hollings (January 17, 1969), 'Desegregation, Public Schools, General, 1969', Box 30, McNair Papers.

⁴⁸ Derrick A. Bell to Nolan Estes, 'Misuse of Title I Funds' (January 19, 1968), 'CR5-3 Mississippi', Box 345, RG 12, NARA.

with an understanding designed to bring cooperation and compliance.’ Exposure to such analysis persuaded Nixon that the southern school question could be quite easily remedied with a team more sympathetic to the South than Johnson appointees like Harold Howe or Nicholas Katzenbach. It could not. By the end of January 1969, the chairman of STAND, a group based in Mobile, Alabama formed to defend ‘freedom of choice’ desegregation plans, was grumbling to reporters that ‘there isn’t any difference between Nixon and Johnson. Our only hope is to repeal the guidelines.’⁴⁹

The South Carolina Cases Offer A Potential Reprieve

After its first painful experience of the school issue in late January 1969, the Nixon White House’s southern strategy went long on form and short on substance. Although both Attorney General Mitchell and Secretary Finch privately agreed with Dent’s prescription for delay, the White House remained content to wait for upcoming judicial decisions to pave the way for concrete policy alterations. When Spiro Agnew requested ‘a concise, positive statement’ in late April 1969 regarding the Nixon’s position on schools for an address at Myrtle Beach, S.C., John Ehrlichman forwarded a *pro forma* response from Secretary Finch insisting that ‘the only change’ in school desegregation guidelines would be in response to judicial rulings.⁵⁰

The White House’s attention had been drawn to a federal suit pending in South Carolina, which it believed could provide a ‘satis[factory] result’ for the Administration’s involvement in southern school desegregation. Sitting *en banc* on March 31, 1969, four federal judges had ordered twenty-two South Carolina school districts involved in court proceedings to work with educators from HEW’s Title IV programme to produce ‘acceptable’ desegregation plans within thirty days. Echoing Judge Wisdom’s opinion in *Jefferson*, the judges observed that since the cases involved ‘few, if any, justiciable issues of constitutional import...[HEW] is far more qualified to deal with such operational and administrative problems than the Courts presided over by

⁴⁹ Harry Dent to Richard Nixon (March 18, 1969), ‘105 closed (desegregation) (2 of 2)’, Box 30, Ehrlichman Files.

⁵⁰ Pat Gray to Robert Finch (c. late June 1969), ‘Civil Rights: 1969, June 20-30’, Finch Papers; Harry Dent to Richard Nixon (March 18, 1969); ‘Sch. guideline file...Guidelines - Finch, Mitchell, RN, JE’ (c. April 1969) & Bud Krogh to John Ehrlichman, ‘Agnew Request for Policy Statement on Desegregation Guidelines.’ (c. April 25 1969): both contained in ‘105 closed (desegregation) (2 of 2)’, Box 34, Ehrlichman Files.

Judges.’

According to a startled official from the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division, this type of court order was unprecedented. Harry Dent was less surprised, noting that many federal benches had reached similar conclusions about their competence to shape such technically-detailed plans. The White House, Dent concluded, should expect that ‘many more will follow.’ Nixon’s closest aides took notice. Preparing the President for a rare press conference in April 1969, John Ehrlichman drew Nixon’s attention to a hypothetical question about relaxation of school guidelines. Circumnavigating the thrust of the enquiry, Ehrlichman instructed that Nixon begin his answer by referring to ‘a very significant, landmark lawsuit presently before the court in South Carolina,’ and explain that the outcome could potentially ‘provide brand new avenues’ of school desegregation. In this context 'brand new' meant that blame might be legitimately passed on away from the White House, not that the process of school desegregation be abated.⁵¹

Situated in the Office of Education, Title IV operations were staffed by professional educators rather than the more idealistic civil servants of the Title VI enforcement operation. Theoretically, this alteration in federal oversight should have placated southern school administrators. If handled correctly, the South Carolina cases presented the Nixon White House with a solution to its Title VI dilemma. The change in emphasis away from Title VI fund terminations would both fulfil a key election pledge and ensure that southern school administrators and politicians were exposed to what the White House presumed would be a more sympathetic Title IV team. For a White House desperate to divest itself of responsibility for desegregation enforcement, the concept also provided ‘plausible deniability’ for any controversial desegregation case. Not only would the court have to validate any plan produced by HEW educators, but enforcement would constitute contempt of court rather than a violation of Title VI. Executive involvement in the compliance side of southern school desegregation would effectively be scaled back to a state not seen since passage of the

⁵¹ ‘Sch. guideline file...Guidelines - Finch, Mitchell, RN, JE’ (c. April 1969), ‘105 closed (desegregation) (2 of 2)’, Box 30, Ehrlichman Files; *Whittenberg v. Greenville County et al.*, United States District Court of South Carolina sitting en banc (March 31, 1969), ‘Civil Rights: 1969, May 19-31’, Box 1, Finch Papers; Harry Dent to Richard Nixon (April 1, 1969), ‘South Carolina (1969-1974)’, State & Territories, Executive, Subject Files, NARA; John Ehrlichman to Richard Nixon, ‘Possible Press Conference Question RE School Guidelines’ (April 17, 1969), ‘105 closed (desegregation) (2 of 2)’, Box 30, Ehrlichman Files.

Civil Rights Act in 1964. This was intentional. John Mitchell's Justice Department refused a request from Title VI operatives to help Title IV unit with negotiations. Prior to the South Carolina cases, Title IV personnel had played no such role in the desegregation process, and had no idea how to effectively negotiate with white southern officials.⁵²

The White House's contorted efforts to politicise such an irredeemably complex system were unsuccessful. Although dedicated to the cause of quality education, Title IV operatives were equally intimate with their obligations when producing desegregation plans as an *amicus curiae*. An early warning was sounded in the South Carolina cases prior to the March 31 court order. When a Title IV official was asked by the federal bench to explain the Administration's position on the guidelines, Harry Dent was horrified to discover that the official planned 'to testify to no change' in open court. An impending public-relations disaster was only narrowly averted when Dent managed to persuade the chief judge to defer testimony. The shrewd South Carolinian quickly realised the implications of the court's request: writing to Nixon the day after the order was handed down that 'what these judges have done is to put this Administration squarely on the spot by placing the authority for the action on HEW.'⁵³

The Administration attached tremendous importance to the South Carolina cases, particularly after it became apparent that the process of negotiation between school officials and HEW educators had not exactly ushered in a new dawn in positive federal-state relationships. By late April 1969, the situation had deteriorated to the point that Finch began to demand a daily report from Leon Panetta on the 'status' of the South Carolina cases. On the basis of this evidence, the HEW Secretary glumly reported to the President that only half the desegregation plans proposed by his department were 'acceptable' to South Carolina whites, and four presented 'very bad ratios' of black-white racial balance that presented particular difficulties to the

⁵² Meeting Notes, 'CW RHF; JGV; LHB; LPG III' (May 17, 1969), 'Civil Rights: 1969, May 1 -19', Box 1, Finch Papers.

⁵³ Harry S. Dent to Richard Nixon (April 1, 1969), 'South Carolina (1969-1974)', State & Territories, Executive, Subject Files, NARA

Administration's southern strategy.⁵⁴

The antagonism between the regulator and regulated that had characterised traditional Title VI enforcement was perpetuated under this new system. Rejection of 'freedom of choice' desegregation plans by the federal government only partially explained such sentiment. Intent on offsetting their inevitable capitulation with a measure of 'lost cause' defiance, the majority of South Carolinian school officials involved in the negotiations took the impossible position that any plans stronger than freedom-of-choice were unacceptable. Of course, HEW educators realised that such plans were generally unconstitutional. Gridlock ensued. Such was the discord between the two parties that the District Court was forced to grant a lengthy extension to the initial thirty-day period. Six weeks after the initial court order, only two school districts had accepted the plans presented to them by HEW. After visiting South Carolina in late May, Leon Panetta concluded that the majority of school districts were prepared to reject HEW's plans and submit their case to the federal bench's judgement, since 'the court affords a longer time factor; the courts may well offer them more than HEW can; and whatever HEW prepares, it is preferable from a political standpoint for the court to force it on the district.' Far better for a southern school district to comply with a court order than appear to be pushed about by a federal bureaucrat.⁵⁵

With school boards publicly decrying the federal government's proposed desegregation plans, many white South Carolinians felt betrayed by the Nixon Administration. In Florence, angry parents responded to the publication of HEW's proposal for their local school district in the *Florence Morning News* by signing and mailing a petition against the putative plans to the White House that same day. It sarcastically suggested that the HEW plan 'must be a proposal of the previous Democratic administration, for this is in direct conflict to your statements as President-elect.' Congressman John McMillan of South Carolina's sixth district wrote to Bryce Harlow protesting against a HEW plan in his district that required cross-town busing. Harlow's reply

⁵⁴ For example, see Leon Panetta to Robert Finch, 'Daily Report on Status of South Carolina cases' (April 30, 1969), 'Civil Rights: 1969, April', Box 1, Finch Papers; 'TT - Finch / 5-15 - 12:15p....So Car' (May 15, 1969), '105 closed (desegregation) (2 of 2)', Box 30, Ehrlichman Files.

⁵⁵ Leon Panetta to Robert Finch, 'Report on South Carolina Trip' (May 26, 1969), 'Civil Rights: 1969, May 19-31', Box 1, Finch Papers.

was unlikely to appease McMillan. Attaching a response from HEW, Harlow indicated that Title IV personnel had drawn the school zones using a pupil locator map that could racially identify the residences of students and thereby achieve a racial balance. The explanation violated Nixon's campaign pledges on schools, yet senior HEW officials personally attested to the plan's constitutionality.

The White House's principal problem was that white southerners still believed that the Nixon Administration enjoyed a considerable amount of discretion in its enforcement of civil rights mandates. Alvin Wall, a Charleston Republican, wrote to Dent to complain that HEW Title IV educators had rejected a local school board's proposal requiring 'absolute freedom of choice' on the basis that it would perpetuate segregation. Observing that the city had staunchly resisted Republican overtures in the 1968 local elections, Wall insisted that 'if HEW keeps "meddling" in our local affairs, our task is going to be even more difficult next year.' That Wall entertained any suggestion that HEW would, or indeed could, stop 'meddling' to disestablish the dual system of education in southern school districts demonstrated white southerners' perpetual delusion on the matter; delusion that the Nixon campaign had irresponsibly fomented.⁵⁶

For Strom Thurmond the controversy proved not only personally embarrassing but politically dangerous. To the Senator's horror, two desegregation plans drawn up by HEW, and leaked to the public, mandated classrooms between fifty-eight and ninety-seven percent black. These plans provoked an unprecedented amount of angry correspondence to Thurmond's Senate office. On May 8, 1969, Drew Pearson and Jack Anderson reported in the *Washington Post* that Thurmond was only dissuaded from 'going to blast the President' after Nixon unexpectedly travelled to South Carolina to pay tribute to Jimmy Byrnes on the veteran politician's ninetieth birthday. Despite such gestures, the Senator was keen for the Nixon Administration to bear witness to his suffering, and ordered his office to forward the 'huge volume of mail' from the two school districts in question on to Bryce Harlow. Thurmond also began writing to the unfortunate Harlow every other day. One missive insisted that 'if this policy is carried out, the Republican

⁵⁶ Petition from Florence Parents to Richard Nixon (May 18, 1969), Bryce Harlow to Strom Thurmond (June 9, 1969) & Bryce Harlow to John McMillan (June 21, 1969): both contained in 'HU 2-1 / ST 40 Education Schooling / South Carolina / Beginning - 12/31/1970', Executive Files, NARA.

Party in the South will probably be destroyed for another generation, as well as the public school system.’ Another concluded in similar tones that, ‘I cannot see how the Republican Party can survive in South Carolina and other southern states unless there is a reversal of this policy.’⁵⁷

Left unspoken was the possibility that Thurmond’s political career could be jeopardised by unintentional complicity in racial integration. By early June 1969, an increasingly desperate Thurmond resorted to writing the President himself, plaintively asking ‘what answer I might give to those in my State who share my deep concern over this matter.’ In a paragraph highlighted by Bryce Harlow for Nixon’s consumption, the normally ebullient Senator admitted that, ‘I am under intense pressure from my constituents on this most important manner, particularly in view of your statements during the campaign on this subject and my strong advocacy of your candidacy.’ Harlow despaired of the situation, complaining bitterly to John Ehrlichman that, ‘Methinks it becomes, now, quite intolerable - after all the meetings, all the agreements, all the Presidential expressions of conviction and concern - that our school stance remains both ambivalent and tilted harmfully to the administration.’ Whilst this issue dominated Harlow’s thinking, his memo also suggested that other ‘urgent and clear’ Administration priorities had similarly atrophied into confusion: specifically Vietnam, inflation, youth disaffection, military policy and the Office of Economic Opportunity. The southern strategy had apparently fallen victim to the same type of conflicting pressures that precluded decisive action in other key policy areas.⁵⁸

Nixon chafed vigorously against these bonds of office. At one particularly frustrating moment in the South Carolina cases, the President privately announced his intention to travel southward and negotiate acceptable settlements himself. Just as Thurmond feared for his Senate seat, so Nixon privately asked Finch if the White House would ‘take the heat’ in the event of a politically undesirable conclusion to the negotiations. Despite

⁵⁷ Strom Thurmond to Bryce Harlow (May 9, 1969) & Bryce Harlow to John Ehrlichman (c. June 1969): both in ‘105 closed (desegregation) (2 of 2)’, Box 30, Ehrlichman Files, NARA; Drew Pearson & Jack Anderson, ‘Another Lockheed Contract Questioned’, *Washington Post* (May 8, 1969). Strom Thurmond to Richard Nixon (June 2, 1969), ‘HU 2-1 / ST 40 Education Schooling / South Carolina / Beginning - 12/31/1970’, Box 15, HU Files, NARA.

⁵⁸ Strom Thurmond to Richard Nixon (June 2, 1969), ‘HU 2-1 / ST 40 Education Schooling / South Carolina / Beginning - 12/31/1970’, Box 15, HU Files, NARA; Bryce Harlow to John Ehrlichman (c. June 1969), ‘105 closed (desegregation) (2 of 2)’, Box 30, Ehrlichman Files.

the President's intense personal concern, cooler heads persuaded him to refrain from indulging in such disproportionate action. Instead, Nixon agreed to a compromise whereby one of Secretary Finch's representatives would travel down to HEW's Atlanta office 'and actually remain there, working out the plans with the regional personnel, in order to insure against slippage.' Pat Gray, a close political ally⁵⁹ of the President, was selected to 'ride herd' down South. His task was two fold: to ensure that the HEW's desegregation plans 'would (a) be developed in method and content in such a manner as to be inoffensive to the people of South Carolina and (b) that the plans advanced by HEW will precedentially be satisfactorily applicable in any subsequent case or cases.' Once again, Nixon's southern strategy would revolve around the Palmetto State.⁶⁰

On May 30, 1969, the federal government submitted its final proposals for these twenty-one school districts to the U.S. District Court of South Carolina. For eighteen of the districts the proposed deadlines for complete desegregation, printed on the page as 1969, were scrubbed out and replaced by pencilled or newly-typed '1970s.' At the last minute, senior Administration figures had overruled the Title IV staff responsible for framing the plans, and ensured that the outcome provided clear concessions to white South Carolinians desperate for any degree of temporary respite from integrated classrooms. The interim measures for school year 1969-70, designed to pave the way for harmonious desegregation, represented little more than token concessions. According to a Southern Regional Council report, at least half of them violated established standards, whilst one HEW official described the rest as little more than 'charitable' gestures to civil rights enforcement.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Pat Gray was so attached to Nixon that, on leaving HEW, he could not bring himself to accept a presidential invitation to the Oval Office because 'my loyalty for you is so deep and my respect and affection for you so profound that I know the tears would flow from my eyes...', Patrick Gray to Richard Nixon (February 3, 1970), Folder 2, Box 2, Nixon-HEW Files, NARA.

⁶⁰ John Ehrlichman to Robert Finch (May 6, 1969); 'TT - Finch / 5-15 - 12:15p....So Car' (May 15, 1969); John Ehrlichman, 'Memorandum of Meeting Between President and Secretary Robert H. Finch, May 15, 1969, 12.15 P.M.' (May 15, 1969): all in '105 closed (desegregation) (2 of 2),' Box 30, Ehrlichman Files.

⁶¹ Gary Orfield, 'The Politics of Resegregation', *Saturday Review* (September 20, 1969), p. 78; Horace Barker, *The Federal Retreat in School Desegregation*, pp. 14-15.

These submissions did not pass unnoticed. In June 1969, the liberal Democratic Study Group wrote its third critical letter in six months to President Nixon, describing the denouement of the South Carolina cases as an ‘alarming’ development in ‘the breakdown of civil rights enforcement in your Administration.’ The United States Commission on Civil Rights was similarly unimpressed. A report on school desegregation published in the fall of 1969 considered these delays the beginning of ‘a slackening of federal efforts to desegregate elementary and secondary schools in the South’ that would reached its apex weeks before the beginning of the new school year in August 1969.⁶²

Shortly after the Commission’s report was released, a career attorney in the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division, James Turner, composed an internal memo scrutinising the allegations contained therein. Whilst highly critical of many assertions and evaluations made in the document, the memo concluded that, in the case of South Carolina, the Commission’s allegations were ‘substantially accurate.’ The southern strategy had apparently triumphed over the imperative of speedy desegregation in the Palmetto State. Qualifying this admission, Turner made the startling claim that HEW had delayed the terminal date for desegregation from 1969 to 1970 without the Justice Department’s ‘knowledge or advice.’⁶³

This revelation contradicts the situation as understood by the white South in the summer of 1969. After a meeting between the President, senior Administration officials and the Louisiana congressional delegation, Pat Gray reported to the excluded Finch that the southerners ‘bitched about HEW. Praised AG & Just(ice).’ With Mitchell considered a sympathetic ear, Dixie’s politicians homed in on the HEW Secretary as a scapegoat for school desegregation progress. Speaking on the House floor, Jack Edwards, a Republican congressman from Alabama, insisted that, ‘the law and Administration policy as stated by President Nixon is

⁶² Democratic Study Group to Richard Nixon (June 27, 1969), ‘School Compliance (February - December, 1969)’, Box 3, Dent Papers; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Federal Enforcement of School Desegregation* (September 11, 1969), p. 51.

⁶³ Jerris Leonard to Leonard Garment (September 29, 1969), ‘Desegregation - General Memoranda (2 of 2) (CFOA 5019)’, Box 79, Garment Files, NARA.

certainly not what is being practised by Secretary Finch and his social reformers.’⁶⁴

By contrast, Turner’s memo suggested that HEW did not simply play a passive role in the Administration’s softening of federal desegregation mandates. The allegation is substantiated by archival evidence. At a joint meeting on the South Carolina cases between HEW and Justice in early April 1969, the latter requested that the school desegregation plans be timed for the fall of that year, since the department had been using a September 1969 deadline in the bulk of their proceedings before the courts. Confronted by recalcitrant school boards in South Carolina, HEW quickly developed different ideas. In a departmental meeting held on May 20, 1969, senior department officials agreed that ‘Maj[ority] Negro Dist[ri]cts in & of itself extends to ’70-71...All Majority non-negro districts sh[ould] be in by ’69 unless they have serious construction prob[lem]s.’ Left unmentioned was the rather pertinent fact that sixteen out of the twenty-one South Carolina school districts involved had black student majorities. Allied to the handful of districts granted delays based on problems with school facilities, the decision mandated postponement of desegregation in the vast majority of cases. According to a memo sent the previous day from Leon Panetta to Secretary Finch, the most pressing difficulty in implementing this decision lay in its violation of the prior ‘agreement with Justice.’ In this instance, it was Secretary Finch, not Attorney General Mitchell, pressing for delay in racial integration.⁶⁵

Policymaking on southern school desegregation did not emerge fully-formed, driven by John Mitchell alone. To accord it strategic coherence and effectiveness is to underestimate just how reactive the Administration’s response to issues such as school desegregation became when confronted with the thorny exigencies of power. The idea of implementing a southern strategy from the Oval Office collided with the necessity of obeying judicial mandates, creating a bitter cocktail of confused compromise. The process was most adeptly

⁶⁴ Agnew Waldron to Pat Gray, ‘Congressional Record - September 23, 1969’, Box 2, Finch Papers. For evidence of the popular perception that Robert Finch consistently fought – generally ineffectively – for effective enforcement of civil rights, see the following Rowland Evans and Robert Novak columns: ‘Finch Pressured into Retreating on School Desegregation Guidelines’, *Washington Post* (June 27, 1969); ‘Finch Blocked Administration Bid To Reverse Desegregation Drive’, *Washington Post* (July 11, 1969) & ‘Mitchell Blocked Finch’s Move on Anti-Integration Proposal’, *Washington Post* (August 6, 1969).

⁶⁵ Leon Panetta to Robert Finch, ‘Approach to South Carolina Cases’ (May 19, 1969), ‘Civil Rights: 1969, May 1 –19’, Box 1, Finch Papers; Pat Gray, Meeting Notes on ‘Civil Rites’ (May 20, 1969), ‘Civil Rights: 1969, May 19-31’, Box 1, Finch Papers.

described by Bradley Patterson, an aide to Leonard Garment who became heavily involved in civil rights issues during Nixon's first term in office. Observing the 'wobbliness' of domestic policy decision-making, Patterson lamented the subsequent 'bassackwardness'⁶⁶ chain of events whereby decisive Administration action on civil rights questions was precipitated, and even determined, by short-term political imperatives. The process was not uncommon in a White House that prized fluid pragmatism over fixed ideological principles. Set the task of justifying in abstract terms Nixon's desire to decentralise control of government spending to the states, speechwriter William Safire later observed it 'strange, fitting a philosophy to the set of deeds, but sometimes that is what has to be done.'⁶⁷

Fashioning a 'National Approach' to School Desegregation

Secretary Finch was given a far harder mandate. Instructed to resolve the South Carolina cases in a fashion broadly acceptable to the white South, Finch had to subsequently develop a compatible 'national approach' to the school desegregation question that could operate as viable policy. Although one can understand the political logic that motivated President Nixon to make the request, as policy the process was chronologically back-to-front. By extemporising on the southern school issue until confronted by the South Carolina cases, the White House had ensured that this particular challenge would wield disproportionate influence over a complex and controversial public policy that would eventually touch on all fifty states. Given the Palmetto State's political importance to the Nixon Administration, it would inevitably be treated with exceptional care.

The HEW Secretary had responded to Nixon's sensitivity on the matter by agreeing to travel to Columbia at Senator Thurmond's request for a grilling on school desegregation guidelines by state educators and politicians. At a special Saturday meeting of senior HEW official on May 17, 1969, Secretary Finch resolved to deal with 'the whole problem of education.' The assembled group proceeded to analyse the South Carolina cases in depth, searching for a broad resolution to the school guideline question. Constrained by these

⁶⁶ The term was a wordplay on 'assbackwardness.'

⁶⁷ Bradley Patterson to Leonard Garment, 'Domestic decision-making under pressure' (c. late February 1970), 'Desegregation - General Memoranda (2 of 2) (CFOA 5019)', Box 79, Garment Files; William Safire, *Before the Fall* (Transaction, 2005), p. 220.

limiting parameters, Finch resolved that HEW divest itself of the burden of Title VI administrative sanctions, and leave matters of enforcement to the courts. The Department would merely serve as monitors of southern schools: passing on compliance records and educational advice to the judiciary when necessary. Most importantly, the plan could be sold to the Attorney General as placing ‘Administration in posture of making more realistic the enforcement of the law, assisting education; Shows S[outh] we are going to do this nationally. Helps educators to plan. Stop momentum toward pair[ing of] white [schools with black schools].’⁶⁸

On hearing HEW’s proposal for enforcement of school desegregation, Pat Gray reported that the Attorney General ‘buys the long-term plan’ as well as the proposed resolution to the South Carolina cases issue. Mitchell even proposed releasing a joint-departmental statement to announce the new policy at the end of the 1968-69 school year. The problem was that the two departments conceived of the announcement in very different terms. Whereas HEW’s representative Pat Gray principally regarded it as a means of improving a system originally designed to tackle very different conditions in southern school systems, Mitchell believed that the statement should be used to emphasise the Nixon Administration’s repudiation of desegregation policy under Johnson. On reviewing a first draft by Gray that emphasised the new plan’s technical accuracy and detail, the nation’s top lawyer coolly rejected the effort as ‘too legalistic. Sh[o]u[l]d be more in nature of PR statement.’ To emphasise his point, the Attorney General dictated a basic structure for the announcement that read more like the impassioned ramblings of a southern demagogue than constructive policy: ‘Start out by lambasting prev[ious] Ad[ministration] for l[eav[ing] us in present morass by reason of confused inconsistent policies; made S[outh] the whipping boy instead of administering an even handed equitable enforcement effort, N-E-S-W.’⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Norman Shavin to George Brand, ‘Report of Visit to South Carolina by The Secretary’ (March 21, 1969) ‘Parris Island, South Carolina: April 25 and 26, 1969’, Box 4, Finch Papers; Meeting Notes, ‘CW RHF; JGV; LHB; LPG III’ (May 17, 1969), ‘Civil Rights: 1969, May 1 –19’, Box 4, Finch Papers. For evidence of Mardian lobbying Finch for delay, see Robert Mardian to Robert Finch, ‘Civil Rights Cases -- Freedom of Choice’ (May 19, 1969), ‘Civil Rights: 1969, May 1 –19’, Box 1, Finch Papers.

⁶⁹ Pat Gray, Meeting Notes on ‘Civil Rites’; Pat Gray, Meeting notes with John Mitchell (c. June 1969), ‘Civil Rights: 1969, June 10-19’, Box 1, Finch Papers.

Ray Price, a White House speechwriter of sanguine temper and moderate sympathies, was assigned the unenviable task of infusing the policy statement with Mitchell's aggressive posturing. His first draft did not disappoint. Price's justification for a new approach to federal enforcement of school desegregation mandates was premised on the outrageous assumption that the current system of 'ineffective and unfair' HEW guidelines 'simply does not work...it has failed.' Consulting Price's draft with horror, Leonard Garment swiftly issued a memo urging that the statement be modified before public release lest it cause a 'political explosion.' Repulsed by the document's 'sharp attacks' on the Johnson Administration's enforcement of civil rights, Garment sternly suggested that the statement concern itself more properly with 'a continuing effort to find realistic and workable ways of promoting desegregation and advancing education.'⁷⁰

Garment's complaints were eventually heeded by senior White House staff, who recommitted the inflammatory document back to Ray Price to 'be buttressed by additional citations of fact.' Executive staff-member Bob Brown, the sole African-American privy to the work-in-progress, wisely presented his critique of the document by citing electoral imperative: school desegregation representing a key issue 'amongst the moderate elements that we hope to encourage' to vote Republican in forthcoming elections. The combination of Brown and Garment's appeals proved influential. Writing to President Nixon, John Ehrlichman requested further revisions to the already-delayed announcement because 'this statement is so critically important that we should not be stampeded into putting out a half-baked or insupportable document.' Compared to Mitchell's irresponsible instructions, it is notable that John Ehrlichman recognised that the announcement could not simply serve as a public-relations statement designed to promote the Nixon Administration amongst white southern constituencies.⁷¹

Fully aware of the statement's potential to backfire spectacularly if handled incorrectly, President Nixon

⁷⁰ Ray Price, 'Statement on School Desegregation - Draft/6/12/69/PRICE' (June 12, 1969), '105 closed (desegregation) (2 of 2)', Box 30, Ehrlichman Files; Leonard Garment to John Ehrlichman (June 16, 1969), '105 closed (desegregation) (2 of 2)', Box 30, Ehrlichman Files.

⁷¹ John Ehrlichman to Richard Nixon (June 19, 1969), Folder 3, Box 1, FG23, Subject Files, NARA; Robert J. Brown to John Ehrlichman (June 18, 1969), 'Desegregation - (Presidential) Statement / July 1969 (CFOA 5019)', Box 79, Garment Files.

ordered all parties involved to ‘stick to technical details’ when publicly discussing document specifics. Drafts of the document were considered so sensitive that copies were allocated a name and number when handed out to staff members. Even John Mitchell, arch southern strategist and a profound influence on the President, would be restrained from indulging in irresponsible political point-scoring. The day and time of release indicated that the White House feared adverse publicity regarding the new policy. On June 30, Leonard Garment wrote to H.R. Haldeman to observe consider the ‘level of impact’ the Administration desired the statement to have on the media: a Tuesday release would have more, and a Thursday release less. That the statement was issued on July 3, 1969, a Thursday, indicated that the Administration was keen to downplay the amount of coverage accorded the new policy position: a bizarre choice had the White House wanted to accrue maximum political reward for the new guidelines amongst white southerners.⁷²

The whole episode proved a repeat of the fund-termination imbroglio back in late January, when the Administration had attempted to add a gloss of southern sympathising to a policy decision mandating the enforcement of existing civil rights mandates. Ambiguity pervaded the statement’s release. Even the usually-forthright Jerris Leonard, assistant attorney general for civil rights, openly told reporters on the document’s release that, ‘I can’t in my wildest dreams tell you how to interpret it.’ Prepping Bryce Harlow for the inevitable deluge of questions about the statement on the Hill, Harry Dent presented two briefs for perusal: one for southerners who had demanded an alteration in the guidelines, and another for ‘pro civil rights people.’ Incredibly, Dent even insisted that, ‘the people who do this job should have a copy of both briefs before them since they may be asked questions which are answered in each.’ A Herblock cartoon in the *Washington Post* a few months later satirised this position with devastating accuracy, depicting a White House aide clutching papers labelled ‘racial equality issues’ soothing a cowering President Nixon with the reassurance that, ‘Yes, sir, we’ll issue some more statements on both sides of the question right away.’⁷³

⁷² For evidence of the draft document’s careful handling, see the folder marked ‘Civil Rights: 1969, June 20-30’ in Box 1, Finch Papers; Leonard Garment to H.R. Haldeman, ‘Procedure on School Statement’ (June 30, 1969), ‘Desegregation - (Presidential) Statement / July 1969 (CFOA 5019)’, Box 79, Garment Files.

⁷³ John Herbers, ‘President Eases School Deadline on Desegregation’, *New York Times* (July 4, 1969); Harry Dent to Bryce Harlow (June 25, 1969), ‘Folder 3,’ Box 1, FG: 23, Subject Files, NARA; Randy Sanders, ‘Rassling a Governor’, *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, 80:3 (Winter, 2002), pp. 338-9.

An Unhappy Response to the July 3 Statement

'Pro civil rights people' were not easily placated by Dent's mollifying brief. Writing in the *Washington Post* under the byline 'President Nixon Keeps Promise of His "Southern Strategy"', one well-informed analyst concluded that the July 3 statement had 'stalled one of the most successful movements towards racial justice in American history.' Progressive white southerners were equally appalled. On hearing that the Administration planned to modify the existing HEW guidelines, Winthrop Rockefeller, the moderate Republican Governor of Arkansas, wrote urgently on the matter to President Nixon. Describing his 'distress' on hearing the news, Rockefeller urged reconsideration on the basis that such a manoeuvre 'breaks faith with black community, and compromises the position of those who have courageously gone ahead with objectivity and a sense of justice.' Rockefeller's special assistant for education was less restrained. Under pressure from HEW to submit a college desegregation plan, he retorted, 'We are out on a limb with the crows pecking at us. Don't come back to us with any comments or direction on our plan until you have some proof of teeth in your enforcement. You don't have it in our state now.'

M. Hayes Mizell, a prominent white South Carolina civil rights activist, described the statement as 'racist,' and resigned his membership of the state advisory committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. Black activists were similarly horrified. The Leadership Conference on Civil Rights instigated a national telegram campaign appealing to the White House against the decision, whilst eight black congressmen publicly wrote to Nixon warning that such action offered African-Americans 'little hope of lawful change.' Already angered by the Administration's controversial proposal to water down the Voting Rights Act, Senator Hugh Scott, the Senate Minority Leader, told newsmen that 'it would not take much more to start a GOP rebellion.'⁷⁴

For southern Republicans, Dent's promises appeared to finally have come true. The day after the statement

⁷⁴ Gary Orfield, 'President Nixon Keeps Promise of his "Southern Strategy"', *Washington Post* (July 6, 1969); Winthrop Rockefeller to Richard Nixon (June 27, 1969), 'Civil Rights: 1969, June 20-30', Box 1, Finch Papers; Rowland Evans & Robert D. Novak, *Nixon in the White House* (Davis-Poynter, 1972), p. 149; Leon Panetta to Robert Finch, 'Partisan Reaction to Reported Guidelines Moves' (July 1, 1969), 'Civil Rights: 1969, July', Box 1, Finch Papers.

was released, Clarke Reed composed a laudatory letter to Harry Dent on behalf of southern Republican chairmen to announce that ‘formerly next week Dent has just been re-christened now Dent.’ The white South would not be placated for long. A mere ten days later, Reed telephoned Dent to complain that he and the other southern chairmen ‘feel they have been fooled’ by seductive rhetoric. After all, HEW’s proposal for relocating the burden of Title VI enforcement with Title IV educators and the courts had mentioned many attractive benefits, but weakening of desegregation enforcement was not one of them. Only the Attorney-General’s amendments to the statement implied that respite from integrated schools could be forthcoming.⁷⁵

Whether intentional or not, Mitchell’s remarks created an expectation that could not be fulfilled by an Administration simultaneously insisting it would implement the *Brown* decision in full compliance with judicial rulings on the subject. Just as Secretary Finch naively believed that Dixie’s politicians and voters could be bought off by southern-friendly rhetoric emphasising ‘quality education,’ so John Mitchell’s ‘PR statement’ of July 3 merely altered the mechanics of school desegregation. It did not constitute the genuine civil-rights slowdown feared by liberals and welcomed by the white South. The White House was not about to clarify the point. At the annual NAACP Convention in July, Roy Wilkins accused the White House of violating constitutional mandates; concluding that the situation was ‘almost enough to make you vomit.’ When Panetta responded to newsmen about Wilkins’ comments by insisting that Nixon was committed to civil rights and the rule of law, he received a phone call from John Ehrlichman at the White House ordering, ‘Cool it, Leon!’⁷⁶

The HEW empire quickly struck back. On July 8, Leon Panetta composed an incendiary response to the July 3 statement that he mailed to civil rights directors at each of the department’s regional offices. Enclosing a copy of the statement itself, Panetta ‘strongly suggested’ that officials use a second attachment as ‘OCR’s working, practical interpretation of the July 3 statement, for the benefit of your regional staff and the school

⁷⁵ Clarke Reed to Harry Dent (July 4, 1969), ‘1969 Southern GOP (2 of 3),’ Box 8, Dent Files; Harry Dent to Richard Nixon, ‘Reaction in the South the Week after Joint Statement’ (July 14, 1969), ‘School Compliance (February - December, 1969),’ Box 3, Dent Papers.

⁷⁶ Richard Reeves, *President Nixon: Alone in the White House* (Simon & Schuster, 2001), p. 118.

districts with which you deal.’ In accordance with Panetta’s explicit insistence that ‘the "School Policies" issued by this Department in March, 1968, are still in effect,’ this brief effectively nullified the Administration’s new policy. As Pat Gray pointed out to Secretary Finch and his deputy Jack Veneman, ‘its effect is to plainly overrule the Secretary DHEW, The A.G. & The President.’ When Attorney General Mitchell heard of these instructions through federal attorneys in the field, he reportedly became ‘wild’ with rage.⁷⁷

A New Approach, Frustrated

Panetta’s memo represented only the beginning of a severe institutional backlash against the Administration’s new policy on southern schools. On May 28, 1969, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that forty-two school districts in Louisiana had violated the *Green* decision by perpetuating all-black schools, and remanded the case back to the Eastern and Western Louisiana District Courts with recommendations that the courts pursue the South Carolina-cases approach of using Title IV educators to procure technical assistance. Judge Dawkins of the Eastern Louisiana District Court would prove a particular menace to the Administration’s hopes of settling the cases without unnecessarily antagonising local white opinion. On July 5, HEW submitted plans calling for the full desegregation of the Louisianan schools involved within six weeks. Describing these plans as ‘ridiculous,’ Dawkins ordered Title IV to rework them into a more realistic format.

When Gregory Anrig, head of the Title IV unit, requested clarification from Robert Mardian as how they should proceed according to the July 3 statement, Mardian insisted that they should neither negotiate nor argue with the school boards, limit their input to pure technical assistance, and attach a disclaimer to their proposed plans divesting themselves of responsibility for its content. Anrig confirmed these instructions, later recalling that the HEW General Counsel insisted the Title IV team not become involved in

⁷⁷ Leon Panetta to HEW Regional Civil Rights Directors (July 8, 1969) & Patrick Gray to Robert Finch & John Veneman (July 16, 1969), ‘Civil Rights: 1969, July’, Box 1, Finch Papers.

‘compromises in negotiation of the degree of desegregation or the timing of desegregation...this is something to be left to the parties, and the court and not the Title IV representatives.’⁷⁸

The courts thwarted the Administration's plan, and created the space necessary for federal bureaucrats to execute their responsibilities. When Anrig explained Mardian's limiting conception of Title IV's role to Judge Dawkins at an informal court hearing, Dawkins erupted in anger, made HEW a party-intervener to the case, and threatened the department with a contempt citation if they did not fully execute the role assigned them by the court. A pattern was set. Judges simply would not accept the White House's attempts to extricate the Department of HEW from responsibility for desegregation plans.⁷⁹

For Gregory Anrig, Dawkins' orders presented the necessary cover to perform his chosen role. Anrig had already told Mardian that the General Counsel's construction of Title IV's role in the case was ‘ag[ain]st his conscience, his commitment to civ[il] rights [fight],’ and only proceeded to argue Mardian's case in front of Judge Dawkins with great reluctance. Working under direction from the court, Anrig's team proceeded to develop their own terminal plans as a point of comparison with the school board submission, over which Title IV educators had no direct authority. When both the school board and HEW plans were presented to the court on July 20, Robert Mardian was furious to discover that Anrig's team had submitted plans which demonstrated the differences between the two, and even ‘proceeded to argue why [school district] plans [were] not educationally sound...[in] direct viol[ation] of what I told [th]em.’ At a departmental meeting with OCR and Title IV officials, a vexed Mardian bitterly concluded that ‘you can't carry out this Admin[istration's] programs thr[o]u[gh] people who do not want to carry them out.’ In 1971, John Mitchell recalled that the Nixon Administration's efforts to transfer ‘all heats to c[ou]rts we could’ on school

⁷⁸ Unsigned meeting notes, ‘Louisiana situation’ (July 21, 1969) & Robert Finch to Richard Nixon, ‘HEW Role in Louisiana Cases’ (July 21, 1969): both in ‘Civil Rights: 1969, July’, Box 1, Finch Papers.

⁷⁹ For an illustration, see Judge Donald Russell of the U.S. District Court of South Carolina's remarks when handing down the final desegregation order in the ‘highly controversial matter’ of Florence School District No. 1 on August 20, 1970. Commenting on this ‘unusual school case,’ Russell denounced HEW's proposed plan as ‘manifestly inadequate and unworkable’ to the point that its practical failings meant that it could only be defended as a list of ‘concepts’ rather than a feasible course of action. Strom Thurmond to Ken Cole (August 28, 1970), ‘HU 2-1 / ST 40 Education Schooling / South Carolina / Beginning - 12/31/1970’, Human Rights File, NARA.

desegregation two years earlier, but concluded that the effort had been in vain since federal judges had simply made HEW construct the plans themselves as an *amicus* party to the case⁸⁰

A combination of HEW bureaucrats and southern judges prevented the Nixon Administration from eroding the federal executive's involvement in enforcing school desegregation. However much the July 3 statement huffed and puffed over the course of two-thousand words to convince the reader that the Nixon Administration had instituted a radical new direction in this area of policy, the announcement's opening sentence ensured continuity over change. By emphasising that the White House was 'unequivocally committed to the goal of finally ending racial discrimination in schools...in accordance with the law of the land,' the Administration recognised the primacy of the judiciary's jurisdiction over the timing and extent of southern school desegregation. Given the trajectory of Supreme Court rulings towards total integration, the Administration effectively admitted the failure of candidate Nixon's campaigning for 'freedom of choice' desegregation plans in the South a year earlier.⁸¹

In *Bring Us Together*, the highly critical memoir of his experiences as a top civil rights official in HEW under Nixon, Leon Panetta observed that 'the statement was developed to serve political rather than enforcement exigencies': recalling that just four days after its release Secretary Finch terminated funds to school districts in Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina. The Justice Department made even greater steps towards compliance, and even announced its intention to sue the entire state of Georgia. Writing in the *New York Times*, Christopher Lydon reported that the Administration had taken more enforcement action in the week after the July 3 statement than the five months before. Barely a week after congratulating Harry Dent on the Administration's new guidelines, Clarke Reed wrote again with disappointment that, 'the Finch-Mitchell statement we gently cheered is within only a few days proving to be real damage to our credibility.'⁸²

⁸⁰ Robert Finch to Richard Nixon, 'HEW Role in Louisiana Cases', 'Civil Rights: 1969, July', Box 1, Finch Papers; 'Louisiana situation' (July 21, 1969); Untitled Meeting Notes beginning '4-21-71 - 9.4 / A - TT, AG, Richardson, Harlow, E', 'JDE Notes of Meetings with the President / 1/5/70 - 4/21/71 (6 of 6)', Box 3, Ehrlichman Files.

⁸¹ 'Text of Statement by Finch and Mitchell on School Desegregation Policy', *New York Times* (July 4, 1969).

⁸² Leon Panetta, *Bring Us Together*, p. 233; Gareth Davies, *See Government Grow*, p. 123-24; Christopher Lydon,

Clarke Reed was not the only southern conservative who quickly realised that the July 3 statement represented the apotheosis, not the repudiation, of ‘the delays, the contradictions, and the changes in position regarding the guidelines’ that had characterised the Nixon Administration’s approach to southern schools during its first year in office. It presented a gold-plated opportunity for southern Democrats to re-establish their credentials on the issue of segregated schools, after Nixon had capitalised so effectively on the Democratic White House’s desegregation policies during the 1968 election. One such figure was John Stennis, a ‘reigning prince of the Senate,’ who keenly observed Nixon Administration’s difficulties in making desegregation policies more palatable down South. Demonstrating just why the fledgling Nixon Administration had attempted to court his favour with plum patronage assignments, the wily Mississippian set out to test the limits of the White House’s commitment to a slowdown in school desegregation enforcement.⁸³

The Southern Strategy at Full Tilt: Urging Delay for Mississippi Schools

The same day as Mitchell and Finch released the revised guidelines, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals ordered thirty-three Mississippi school districts to prepare desegregation plans with HEW Title IV educators. Fourteen had a majority of African-American students. As in South Carolina and Louisiana, for most of the school districts the Title IV unit produced plans mandating total desegregation by the start of the 1969-1970 school year. Three weeks before the plans were due, Stennis composed a letter to Bryce Harlow to voice his concerns about Gregory Anrig, the Title IV official in charge of the Mississippi operation, and to warn that ‘only chaos can result when such desegregation plans developed primarily by educators substantially unfamiliar with the school districts are placed into effect.’⁸⁴

‘Waterbury Faces Desegregation Suit’, *New York Times* (July 9, 1969).

⁸³ Evans & Novak, *Nixon in the White House*, p. 153; Ken Belieu to Bryce Harlow (August 12, 1969), ‘School Busing, Whitten Amendment’, Box 34, Ehrlichman Files.

⁸⁴ John Stennis to Bryce Harlow (c. July 1969), ‘105 closed (desegregation (1 of 2))’, Box 30, Ehrlichman Files.

Despite Senator Stennis' intervention, Anrig continued to develop plans in accordance with the Fifth Circuit's express wishes. Having studied the plans submitted to the court by HEW's Title IV representatives, Stennis intensified his protest. Aware that the Nixon White House was relying on his floor management of the ABM legislation to secure its passage through the U.S. Senate, Senator Stennis composed a ruthless missive to Nixon. Should the President not arrange for the 'ridiculous and absurd' HEW plans to be directly countermanded in favour of more lenient terminal deadlines, Stennis announced that he would be compelled to 'leave his duties' in Washington and return to Mississippi to fight 'to preserve our public education system.' Of course, Stennis sweetly added, the second ranking member of the Armed Services Committee, Senator Stuart Symington of Missouri, would be 'glad to assume these committee responsibilities.' Symington was against ABM funding. Although flatly denied by the White House at the time, Stennis effectively threatened to prioritise segregated schools in his home state over an issue of national defence.⁸⁵

The Nixon Administration capitulated to Stennis' demands. In a humiliating letter to the Fifth Circuit dated August 19, 1969, Secretary Finch argued against the plans submitted by his own department as liable to precipitate 'chaos, confusion, and a catastrophic setback to the 135,700 children, black and white alike, who must look to the 222 schools of these 33 Mississippi districts for their only available educational opportunity.' Echoing Stennis' allegations, Finch observed that the terminal plans were prepared by Title IV personnel 'under great stress in approximately three weeks,' and that the new school year was now so close that the plans could never be properly executed in time. Finch even repeated the Mississippian Senator's prediction of 'chaos' should the proposals be accepted by the court. The HEW Secretary had certainly received no such warning from any of his Title IV educators involved in constructing the Mississippi plans.⁸⁶

By contrast, Gregory Anrig had testified the exact opposite in his letter to the Fifth Circuit just eight days

⁸⁵ Ken Belieu to Bryce Harlow (August 12, 1969); Evans & Novak, *Nixon in the White House*, p. 153; Richard Reeves, *President Nixon*, p. 119. For examples of historians emphasising the ABM issue to the detriment of the list of Administration action's on school desegregation, see: Melvin Small, *The Presidency of Richard Nixon* (University Press of Kansas, 1999), p. 164; Iwan Morgan, *Nixon* (Arnold, 2002), p. 82; Richard Reeves, *President Nixon*, p. 119 & Evans & Novak, *Nixon in the White House*, p. 153.

⁸⁶ Robert Finch to Judge William Cox (August 19, 1969), 'Civil Rights: 1969, September 1-10', Box 2, Finch Papers; There is nothing in Finch's personal papers from the period to contradict Anrig's earlier testimony to the workability of the plans.

earlier. In his submission, Anrig confidently wrote that ‘each of the enclosed plans is educationally and administratively sound, both in terms of substance and in terms of timing.’ As his statement represented the most obvious contradiction to Finch’s cynical epiphany on these proposals, Administration loyalists exerted intense pressure on the unfortunate Anrig to publicly reverse himself. On 22 August 1969, Anrig was subject to two hours’ worth of aggressive questioning by Jerris Leonard whilst in the presence of senior HEW officials including Secretary Finch, Under-Secretary Veneman and Leon Panetta. Distressed and angered by the presence of a court stenographer at the meeting, Anrig requested legal representation and insisted on reading key material into the record. Having reiterated his intense ‘personal and professional reservations’ about the meeting, Anrig insisted that he had a responsibility to assure ‘the constitutional rights of citizens of this country,’ and courageously rebuffed Leonard’s attempts to procure testimony to the effect that the Mississippi desegregation plans would hinder quality education in the state.

Desperate for such expert testimony, Leonard resorted to power games. After refusing to testify in favour of delay, one HEW official summoned from Atlanta ‘had my job threatened for the first time in my life.’ Departmental sources later alleged that Leonard consistently asked potential testifiers ‘what their job ambitions in Government were.’ The tactic failed. Confronted by a bureaucratic culture that prioritised the ethical wages of rightness over the prospect of promotion, Leonard could only procure testimony for delay from relatively obscure HEW employees.⁸⁷

This failure did not help his cause in front of the U.S. District Court of Southern Mississippi in late August 1969. Presiding Judge Walter L. Nixon Jr. commenced proceedings by acerbically observing that ‘HEW has in effect requested that the Court not consider the plans which they have filed.’ Appearing before the Court on August 25, Leonard barely attempted to conceal the profound discomfort he felt in pressing for delay. When NAACP lawyers moved to drop the U.S. Government as a party-plaintiff to their case, Judge Nixon asked the Assistant Attorney General for his position on the motion. ‘I think it would be most difficult for

⁸⁷ Charles Peters & Taylor Branch, *Blowing the Whistle* (Praeger, 1972), p. 156; Transcript of In-House Conference of Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (22 August 1969), ‘Civil Rights: 1969, August 22: In-House Conf. Transcript,’ Box 2, Finch Papers.

me,' Leonard awkwardly replied, 'if the Court please, to comment on comments of counsel and the motion without coming very close to the verge of offending someone.' Years later, Leonard reluctantly admitted that the Administration's pleas for delay in Mississippi were indefensible.⁸⁸

Civil rights supporters responded to the Administration's cynical manoeuvring with anger and foreboding. On September 3, 1969, the NAACP's Legal Defense Fund published a full-page advertisement on page twelve of the *New York Times*. In large type it announced, 'On August 25, 1969, the United States Government broke its promise to the children of Mississippi.' Observing that this 'step back' had been taken not by 'a group of red-neck sheriffs of Ku Klux Klanners...but some of the highest appointed officials in the land,' the Fund solicited contributions by rhetorically demanding that, 'if the Government no longer defends the rights of Negro school children, who will?' The vast majority of lawyers working in the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division agreed with the Legal Defense Fund's analysis. Sixty-five out of seventy-four of the division's non-supervisory attorneys signed their name to a resolution protesting a motion they believed 'will seriously impair the ability of the Civil Rights Division, and ultimately the Judiciary, to attend to the faithful execution of the federal civil-rights statutes.'⁸⁹

The Supreme Court's commitment to the principle of school desegregation ensured that these concerns would prove misguided.⁹⁰ The ruthlessness with which the Administration executed a complete *volte-face* on HEW's proposals for desegregation in Mississippi might be more usefully considered as evidence of impotence than egregious 'imperial' power. Had the White House exerted the necessary control over HEW's Title IV unit, the latter would never have submitted desegregation plans that proposed 1969 desegregation deadlines. Had HEW officials placed job security over moral principles, Administration enforcers would

⁸⁸ *U.S. v. Hinds County School Board et al* (Civil Action No. 4075(J), United States District Court, Southern District of Mississippi, August 21-22, 1969, 'Civil Rights: 1969, August 26: (U.S. v. Hinds County School Board, etc)', Box 2, Finch Papers; Patricia Sullivan, 'Obituary: Jerris Leonard, Justice Department Official', *Washington Post* (August 3, 2006).

⁸⁹ Advertisement by the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, *New York Times* (September 3, 1969); Charles Peters & Taylor Branch, *Blowing the Whistle*, p. 154.

⁹⁰ For an example of Justice Hugo Black's thoughts on the intimate relationship between Nixon's southern strategy and the Administration's petition for delay in the Mississippi school desegregation cases, see Bob Woodward & Scott Armstrong, *The Brethren: Inside the Supreme Court* (Simon & Schuster, 1979), pp. 37-8.

have easily located government witnesses to back up the observations made by Secretary Finch in his letter to the Court. Had Jerris Leonard genuinely feared the White House's wrath, he surely would not have superciliously refused to comment on the prosecution's motion to drop the U.S. Government as party plaintiff. Leonard was not the only senior civil rights bureaucrat to be spared serious censure for questioning the Administration's civil rights policies. Somewhat unbelievably, Leon Panetta survived the Attorney General's discovery of his insubordinate memo countermanding the July 3 statement, and lasted another six months in his post. Secretary Finch's plea for clemency was upheld, despite Panetta's comments being widely disseminated through the national press.

The Nixon White House simply did not enjoy the broad power over domestic policy-making that it could generally exercise over foreign affairs. However much Nixon railed against the Supreme Court, he was unwilling to threaten a constitutional crisis by throwing down the gauntlet over school desegregation. In the wake of the government's defeat in the *Alexander v. Holmes* case, Senator Thurmond praised Nixon for standing 'with the South in this case.' The rhetoric was deliberately misleading, and concealed the inevitable consequences of the decision under a cloud of 'lost cause' defiance. Just two days after the Supreme Court's decision was handed down, an ad-hoc committee on school desegregation comprising senior officials from both HEW and Justice began planning for complete integration of the thirty-three Mississippi school districts. The rest of the South was slated to quickly follow. Jerris Leonard, who had advocated delay in court just months before, was so emboldened by the decision that he even wrongly claimed the *Alexander* opinion gave the federal government the right to close down any school district not operating a desegregated system.⁹¹

The Mississippi intervention was a charade designed to placate Stennis and create the illusion that the Administration would, or indeed could, reverse the pace of school desegregation. As an aggravated Leonard admitted to Anrig at the tense 'in-house conference' in mid-August, 'what we are looking for is a simple

⁹¹ 'Mississippi Told To Desegregate' *The State* (October 30, 1969), Anonymous meeting notes from 'Coordinating Committee' (October 31, 1969), 'Civil Rights: 1969, October', Box 3, Finch Papers.

motion extending the whole blooming thing to December 1, period.' Around the same time, the assistant attorney general was reported to exclaim, 'The South...the South, I'm so goddamn sick of hearing about the South...we're fighting over the law in order to give something to a bunch of racists.' These comments were far more representative of the bureaucracy's position on civil rights than Leonard's uncomfortable testimony for delay. It is equally unlikely that President Nixon himself welcomed the Mississippi crisis, having just begun a short summer break at the Western White House when Stennis' letter arrived. Far from a long-range strategic manoeuvre, in this instance the Administration's cynical position was precipitated events outside its control.⁹²

This narrative supports Mary Dudziak's contention that, under President Nixon, civil rights 'was no longer a critical issue in U.S. foreign affairs' as under his two immediate predecessors. Nixon's southern strategy was not entirely insulated from foreign policy concerns, but these did not necessarily operate to incentivise civil rights reform. During the Mississippi crisis, the reverse was actually true. Dudziak's conclusion that this constituted the loss of a 'crucial element of leverage' for the civil rights movement is fair, but ignores the point that external pressure on the federal government was no longer the pre-eminent engine of reform. As the Mississippi crisis and the Supreme Court's subsequent response demonstrated, the greatest pressure against the 'southern strategy' emanated from within the political system itself.⁹³

Staring into Pandora's Box

In the midst of one school desegregation crisis in June 1969, Pat Gray composed a despairing *crie de coeur* lamenting the difficulties of bridging the chasm between the Administration's electoral imperatives and legal mandates. 'Our dilemma all along,' Finch's assistant lamented in uncharacteristically expansive terms, 'has been: How do we make good on campaign statements which when uttered were not supported by sound

⁹² Transcript of In-House Conference of Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (22 August 1969); Robert Novak & Roland Evans, *Nixon in the White House* (Davis-Poynter, 1972), p. 157.

⁹³ Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights* (Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 248 & 250.

research and not based upon the first hand look we now have into the perils of Pandora's box of Civil Rights questions?' As John Mitchell implied in his infamous 'watch what we do, not what we say' quotation, the Nixon White House's answer was misdirection. By symbolically standing 'with the South,' it hoped to carry out its legal responsibilities to desegregate the region's schools without losing too much political capital. As a direct result of the *Alexander* decision, on February 1, 1970, the Nixon Administration presided over the desegregation of more than 700,000 pupils from over thirty-five school districts in eight southern states. HEW spokesmen estimated that more than 200,000 were black, and 500,000 white. Seven months later, virtually every single southern school district in the South desegregated in fulfilment of the Supreme Court's mandate. The Administration's July 3 statement proved a mirage for a white southern constituency desperate to slake its thirst for segregated schooling.⁹⁴

Given the literature that has emerged over the last two decades emphasising the perpetuation of liberal policies after the decline of the Great Society,⁹⁵ it is perhaps unsurprising that, once in office, the Nixon Administration struggled to fashion a more conciliatory policy on school desegregation. Challenging the idea that the decline of mass social protest and rise of a more conservative politics decelerated the progress of civil rights reform during this period, John Skrentny has observed that 'in the late 1960s and early 1970s...formal members of social-movement organizations held positions of power in Congress and the bureaucracy, and strong advocates also worked out of the White House.' Underscoring the contemporary finding that liberal bureaucrats represented an overwhelming threat to Nixon's desire to reform Great Society programmes, Skrentny concluded that the minority rights revolution was perpetuated under the Nixon

⁹⁴ Pat Gray to Robert Finch (c. late June 1969), 'Civil Rights: 1969, June 20-30', Box 1, Finch Papers; 'Mississippi Told To Desegregate' (October 30, 1969), *The State* (October 30, 1969); James K. Batten, 'Today is "Total Integration Day" in Dixie', *Detroit Free Press* (February 1, 1970), 'Civil Rights, Education, Desegregation, General, 1970 (Folder 1)', Box 106, McNair Papers.

⁹⁵ For example, see Hugh Davis Graham, *The Civil Rights Era: Origins and Development of National Policy, 1960-1972* (Oxford University Press, 1990); John Skrentny, *The Minority Rights Revolution* (Belknap Press, 2002); Gareth Davies, *See Government Grow: Education Politics from Johnson to Reagan* (University Press of Kansas, 2007); Kent Germany, *New Orleans After the Promises: Poverty, Citizenship, And the Search for the Great Society* (University of Georgia, 2007); James T. Patterson, 'The Rise of Rights and Rights Consciousness, 1930s-1970s' in *Contesting democracy: substance and structure in American political history, 1775-2000* edited by Byron E. Shafer and Anthony J. Badger (University Press of Kansas, 2001): 201-224. A contemporary illustration of the same point from a disillusioned ultra-conservative Nixon staffer can be found in Patrick Buchanan, *Conservative Votes, Liberal Victories: Why the Right Has Failed* (Quadrangle, 1975).

Administration and beyond by relatively-obscure officials 'wearing suits, sitting at desks, firing off memos, and meeting in government buildings.' Many contemporary civil rights activists would have been shocked and appalled by such an assessment. In a 1973 collection of essays by prominent black activists and intellectuals, one contributor mourned 'the shadows of the '70s and the depths of despair where the bright dreams of yesterday strangled on the bitter gall of rising indifference toward efforts to solve America's racial dilemma.'⁹⁶

Such despair hinged on the development of a new political climate. No longer did the federal government appear united against racial discrimination in the way it had in the two years after John F. Kennedy's assassination. In the summer of 1969, civil rights leaders roundly condemned the Nixon Administration's perpetual public prevarication over the enforcement of black civil rights. On August 6, 1969, the Urban League's Whitney Young explained to author Allan Wolk that Nixon's civil rights stances had made, 'Southerners think all of these things can be diluted, rescinded, or revoked.' Undoubtedly, both southerners and African-Americans alike paid serious attention to the Nixon Administration's rhetoric. In the same month, the NAACP's chief lobbyist, Clarence Mitchell, insisted that Nixon 'was supposed to be bringing the people together, but instead has consigned Negroes to a political doghouse whose roof leaks.'⁹⁷

Historians have followed suit, and assumed that the President's politicking and prevaricating translated into civil rights setbacks. In the words of one particularly vehement analysis, Nixon's presidency sought 'to signal the end of the Second Reconstruction.' This line of interpretation remains relatively commonplace. Rick Perlstein's *Nixonland*, for example, insisted that 'Nixon didn't care much about domestic policy - except for the kind of stuff he hired Harry Dent to worry about: blocking school integration.' Given that *Nixonland* was showered with accolades, including a *New York Times* notable book for 2008, such damning analysis evidently remains dominant.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ John D. Skrentny, *The Minority Rights Revolution* (Belknap Press, 2002), p. 5; Thomas Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty* (Random House, 2008), p. 494.

⁹⁷ Allan Wolk, *The Presidency and Black Civil Rights* (Associated University Presses, 1971), footnote 32 at p. 233.

⁹⁸ Bruce H. Kalk, 'Wormley's Hotel Revisited: Richard Nixon's Southern Strategy and the End of the Second

This chapter suggests a different story to the one related by Perlstein. Whilst not eschewing the unsavoury politicisation of civil rights enforcement, it reveals that presidential power meant relatively little in the face of the twin constraints of judicial pressure and a bureaucratic culture dedicated to the task of reforming southern schools. Nixon ranted, raved and cajoled, but was engaged in a futile endeavour. The tide of civil rights reform simply would not be turned back. After Nixon's 'freedom-of-choice' rhetoric during the presidential campaign, the white South expected a different outcome. When the federal judiciary ratcheted up civil rights enforcement in the wake of the *Alexander v. Holmes* decision of October 1969, Dixie became increasingly restless. By the early months of 1970, it was clear that the Nixon Administration could no longer walk a tightrope between the two. A choice had to be made between enforcing the law and satisfying the white South. It would not be easily made.

Reconstruction.' *North Carolina Historical Review* 71 (January 1994), p. 102; Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland* (Scribner, 2008), p. 393. For evidence of *Nixonland's* positive critical reception, see <http://books.simonandschuster.co.uk/Nixonland/Rick-Perlstein/9780743243032>: Accessed on 03/29/2012.

Chapter III

Getting Hit From Both Sides:

The Nixon Administration Reaches A Time for Choosing

At seven o'clock on the morning of March 3, 1970, Captain J. Leon Gasque of the South Carolina Law Enforcement Department stood waiting for three yellow buses to arrive in the tiny hamlet of Lamar. These particular buses carried black children to the recently integrated local school, and had prompted an angry mob of two hundred local whites to congregate in the American Legion hut that lay abandoned nearby. Along with fellow SLED officers and the local highway patrol, Gasque's task was to keep the menacing adults away from vulnerable children. The men gradually converged towards the school grounds, armed with axe handles, chains, bricks and canisters of mace spray. With the buses arriving, Gasque took action. Striding up to the mob's leader, Jeryl Best, he pleaded that their grievances be redressed in a court of law. His efforts were in vain. An unsighted axe handle crashed into the back of the captain's head, propelling him into an adjacent ditch. The Lamar bus riot had begun. 'For some 35 minutes,' Lamar High School Principal Gordon Cole later reported, 'it was hotter out there on that school ground than in Vietnam.'

Charging at the two school buses that could not make a hurried escape, the mob unleashed its hellish fury. One veteran law officer present at the scene described the group as 'the meanest crowd I've ever encountered...these people stood toe-to-toe with us and took everything we dished out.' Whilst some focused their efforts on battling the authorities, others attacked the yellow school buses that sat helpless in the road: their engines quickly disabled, young passengers petrified. Rocks, sticks and axe handles rained down on the bus windows, propelled by middle-aged farmers in blue denim overalls and snap-brim hats. One man wielding an axe handle in the throng was estimated to be at least seventy. Inside the buses, teenage boys ushered the sole girl onto the floor and stood in a circle to protect them from the flying glass shards. The

atmosphere of terror was intensified by several of the rioters trying to force open the bus doors.¹

Back on his feet, Captain Gasque helped law enforcement troops clear a passage through the mayhem and usher the students off the buses and towards their school. As Gasque and a state trooper emerged from one bus with its final passenger, a small child sporting leg braces, they narrowly missed being crushed by the falling vehicle. Having failed to gain entry onto the buses, the rioting masses were now tipping them over. With the children moving away from the buses, enforcement officials released tear gas at the mob. Still the men would not give up: one particularly hardy individual battled with a tear gas machine even as its noxious emissions seeped into his eyes and nose. Demonstrating that the target of their ire was as much the black school children as the yellow school buses, the rioters pelted the wailing and spluttering students with stones as they scrambled towards the safety of the school doors.²

Miraculously, no one was seriously hurt during the incident. The children involved managed to escape serious physical injury, although all sustained bruises and cuts. One girl involved found shards of glass in her hair for months. Some of the students even reported pistols firing at the bus. The horrifying news spread quickly across the country. The same day, a South Carolina émigré living in Omaha, Nebraska, wrote to Governor Robert McNair, 'I was ashamed of my home state when I read of white [people] attacking black school children with dangerous weapons.' The next morning, the Lamar riot made front-page news in both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, whose chilling headline read, 'S.C. Police Beat Back White Mob Trying to Attack Black Pupils.' Lamar residents saw things differently. One bluntly told a reporter from the *Baltimore Afro-American*, 'I hate the damn niggers, I don't want anything to do with them and I don't want my child to have anything to do with them.' When thirty-two men were taken to jail on riot charges, friends and relatives stood in the rain to cheer them on. The townspeople believed in segregation, and many

¹ Telex: Bill Hughes to Goldman, 'Lamar Incident' (March 5, 1970), Folder 8, Box 8, *Newsweek* Atlanta Bureau Records; Interview with J. Preston Strom & J. Leon Gasque (March 24, 1980), Interview 1/4/2, McNair Oral History Project, pp. 41-3.

² Telex: Bill Hughes to Goldman (March 5, 1970); Jon Nordheimer, 'Gas Routs Whites Who Upset Buses at Carolina School,' *New York Times* (March 4, 1970); Arthur W. Stanley, 'White Violence - Lamar, S.C.' *Crisis* (May 1970), pp. 196-202.

applauded those who sought to defend it at any price.³

In his account of the Boston busing crisis, Ronald Formisano described white antibusing protesters in Boston as 'reactionary populists', whose crude racism has unhelpfully obscured genuine frustration with the class-based legal remedies that placed the burden of desegregation onto blue-collar families in that city. In simpler terms, Formisano's protesters were angrier with white elites in government than the black children at their schools. The difficulty with this analysis is that Formisano's protesters were really angry with white elites *for* the black children in their schools. Desegregation 'from above' inevitably produced class animosities, particularly when handled as perversely as in Boston, yet the Lamar riot demonstrated that the only alternative was anarchy. The following pages reinforce the vital importance of state power in securing racial equality. In a society as racially polarised as South Carolina, universal human rights and the democratic ideal were not always compatible.⁴

Lamar challenged the 'conspiracy of peace' conceived nearly a decade earlier by the state Democratic establishment.⁵ As one official from the State Department of Education later confided to a New York journalist, the Lamar riot 'embarrassed the people in this state and it came as a complete shock to us.' Having heard details of the attack first-hand from Captain Gasquet, McNair was well situated to immediately condemn it as 'an act which defies all human reason and understanding.' The next few lines of his statement were more opaque. 'As deeply as we deplore this incident,' McNair continued, 'we are equally appalled at those who have helped to create the type of dangerous and inflammatory public attitude which makes such

³ Stanley, 'White Violence – Lamar, S.C.', p. 201; Joy E. McClellan to Robert McNair (March 3, 1970), 'Desegregation, Public Schools, Lamar Incident, 1970, Out-of-State, March 3-6', Box 31, McNair Papers; Nordheimer, 'Gas Routs Whites' & Fred McNeese, 'S.C. Police Beat Back White Mob Trying to Attack Black Pupils', *Washington Post* (March 4, 1970); 'Many Of Lamar's Whites Seem Proud Of Attack On Children,' *Baltimore Afro-American* (March 21, 1970).

⁴ Ronald Formisano, *Boston Against Busing*, (University of North Carolina Press, 1991), p. 3. For Formisano's global analysis of 'reactionary populist' parties, see Formisano, 'Interpreting Right-Wing or Reactionary Neo-Populism: A Critique', *Journal of Policy History* 17.2 (2005).

⁵ For a more detailed explanation of the 'conspiracy of peace,' see Chapter One.

an act possible.’⁶

McNair's target was Albert Watson, a Republican congressman desperate for an issue to spark his candidacy for governor into life. Speaking frankly to a fellow party member in May 1970, Watson's campaign manager explained that 'we're going to run a racist campaign.' Given that 1970 was the year of massive desegregation in South Carolina, Watson planned to ride a wave of social turmoil into high office the following November. This intention had already been expressed by an incendiary speech given in Lamar prior to the rioting. Watson refused to alter his inflammatory style in the wake of the disorder. When *Newsweek* planned an article in the summer of 1970 entitled 'Playing politics with children,' southern correspondents mooted Albert Watson's candidacy as a touchstone for the entire piece.⁷

This cynical attitude was echoed in certain quarters of the White House. Harry Dent later advised President Nixon that the 'Administration is not particularly hurt' by the necessity of quelling racist white protest, since 'Attorney General [John Mitchell] made Governor [McNair] enforce public safety.' Two senior officials from SLED later recalled that Mitchell had 'issued a restraining type order but made it incumbent upon the governor of the state to enforce it, rather than the United States marshal. We've never seen one before or since that way.' As a result, federal marshals had simply 'sat in their cars and watched the buses being turned over.' In this instance, Dent and Mitchell's priority rested with electoral calculations rather than responsible governance. It is notable that when South Carolina law enforcement officials carried out mass night-time arrests of the Darlington County residents involved, Harry Dent circulated a newspaper article in the White House decrying this type of arrest as 'the universal symbol of the police state.'⁸

⁶ B.J. Richey, 'S.C. Citizen Panel Adopts "Soft-Sell" for School Peace, *The Long Island Press* (N.Y.) (August 23, 1970), 'South Carolina News Clippings', Box 5, Cabinet Committee on Education Files.

⁷ Oral History with Daniel I. Ross Jr., interviewed by Herbert Hartsook (October 4, 2001), USCPC, p. 42; Telex, 'Lamar Incident'; Hank Leifermann to Jerry Footlick & Joe Cumming, 'Some proposals and thoughts on the southern school desegregation cover' (August 19, 1970), 'School Deseg - Fall 70', Box 11, 'School Deseg 1954-70', *Newsweek* Atlanta Bureau Records, Emory.

⁸ Harry Dent to Richard Nixon, 'Dent and Phillips Comment on N.Y. News Column re Wallace' (March 13, 1970), 'Memos to the President (January - March, 1970)', Box 5, Dent Papers; Interview with Strom & Gasque (March 24,

President Nixon held different concerns. On reading that Thurmond had denounced the rioters as having ‘sickened South Carolina and the nation,’ Nixon exclaimed, ‘Good! Strom.’ The President was all too aware that a coterie of Dixie demagogues remained keen to exploit the ugly strain of visceral racism that still pervaded the region. When the Supreme Court handed down the *Swann* decision in the spring of 1971, which legitimised busing as an acceptable tool for school desegregation, Nixon worried that ‘the Country [could] come apart,’ and imagined with trepidation the response to the ruling by ‘racist dogs’ in Dixie who would be ‘in full cry & will [a]ffect the decent people’ in the South.⁹

Richard Nixon’s fears mirrored those that had motivated South Carolina Democrats to develop a conspiracy of peace to forestall reactionary politicians from inciting violent disorder amongst the state’s white population. Richard Nixon’s brand of political centrism tallied far closer with South Carolina Democrats like Robert McNair than it did their GOP counterparts.¹⁰ In the wake of the Lamar bus riot, one Darlington County resident asked whether ‘concerned, intelligent people who would return sanity to our country,’ like President Nixon and Vice-President Agnew, ‘are representative of the S.C. Republican Party.’ The implied answer was negative. Instead, the author concluded, individuals like Ray Harris, GOP state chairman, and Albert Watson ‘are playing up to some of the people I have known all my life – they are in the main “Wallaceites”.’¹¹

1980), p. 43; Interview with Robert S. Davis (September 25, 1979), Interview 1/12/1, McNair Oral History Project, p. 21; Harry Dent to John Mitchell (March 14, 1970), ‘1970 Memos to the Cabinet Members’, Box 4, Dent Files.

⁹ Untitled document commencing ‘(3) WELFARE - A sweeping welfare-reform bill affecting some 25 million’, ‘News Summaries - March 1970’, Box 31, President’s Office Files, NARA; Untitled document commencing ‘4-21-71 - 9.4 / A - TT, AG, Richardson, Harlow, E’, ‘JDE Notes of Meetings with the President / 1/5/70 - 4/21/71 (6 of 6)’, Box 5, Ehrlichman Files.

¹⁰ One political survey carried out in South Carolina in August 1966 found that voters grouped Nixon and McNair together as ‘moderates with conservative leanings.’ Thurmond was assessed as far more extreme than either these two. See Oliver Quayle & Co., ‘A Survey of the Political Climate in South Carolina’ (August 1966), ‘1966, Survey of the Political Climate in South Carolina’, Box 8, Workman Papers.

¹¹ L. Lewellyn to Unknown Recipient (March 2, 1970), Folder 138, Duffy Papers.

Nevertheless, President Nixon remained convinced that it was possible to advocate a moderate position on schools and cultivate the support of white reactionaries. Despite appearing to be exactly the demagogue Nixon claimed to hold in contempt, Albert Watson received substantial support from the President throughout his controversial campaign for Governor. In a meeting to discuss White House assistance to Republican candidates held in the Oval Office on July 22, 1970, Watson was the only gubernatorial candidate granted financial help. The South Carolinian subsequently received nearly ten thousand dollars whereas his counterparts in Texas, Tennessee and Georgia were accorded 'wait and see' status.¹²

Whilst offering succour to Albert Watson's candidacy, President Nixon's action on schools from the spring of 1970 onwards simultaneously undermined Watson's electoral credibility. That President Nixon himself supported such firmness constituted a genuine shift in Administration policy. Whereas the pressure to desegregate had previously emanated from the federal bureaucracy and the courts, by the spring of 1970 even President Nixon accepted the process as an inevitability best surmounted quickly. As Governor McNair goaded South Carolina Republicans at the end of January 1970, 'the President is not listening any more to Sen. Thurmond.' By the summer of 1970 even the *New York Times*, a fervent critic of the President's relationship with Dixie reactionaries, admitted that the southern strategy 'seems badly dented,' and southern Republicans left 'confused, worried and hinting at betrayal.'¹³

How did this happen? Why did Nixon effectively abandon the southern strategy at a time when the region appeared so ripe for political exploitation? This chapter's purpose is to reconstruct the process whereby President Nixon decided to push for the massive desegregation of southern schools in the fall of 1970, despite intense contrary political pressure from southerners and conservatives.

¹² Harry Dent, 'Notes on Political Meeting with the President on July 22' (July 29, 1970), included in bundle of documents entitled, Harry Dent, 'Report for the President's file on his political meeting with Messrs. Finch, Rumsfeld, Dent, Harlow, Chotiner, and Haldeman on Wednesday, July 22 at 3:00 p.m.' (July 29, 1970), 'Beginning July 19, 1970', Box 81, President's Office Files, NARA.

¹³ For full details of Strom Thurmond's involvement in South Carolina school desegregation during the spring of 1970, see below. For a brief summary, see Ken Clawson, 'Thurmond Quietly Acts To Spur S.C. Integration', *Washington Post* (July 31, 1970). For McNair quote, see William E. Mahoney, 'President Not Listening', *The State* (January 31, 1970), 'General, 1970', Box 106, McNair Papers. For NYT column, see Jon Nordheimer, "'Southern Strategy' Seems Badly Dented', *New York Times* (July 26, 1970).

South Carolina Republicans Find Their Issue

In December 1969, South Carolina's largest television station, WIS-TV, named Judge Clement Haynsworth of the Fourth Circuit of Appeals as its 'Man of the Year', after Haynsworth's nomination to the Supreme Court was blocked by the Senate on the grounds of his hostility to civil rights and labour. His popularity was short-lived. On January 26, 1970, Judge Haynsworth ordered the immediate desegregation of several dozen southern school districts in accordance with the Supreme Court's decision in *Alexander* two months earlier. Lamenting that he enjoyed 'no judicial discretion to postpone immediate implementation' of school desegregation mandates, Haynsworth insisted that no practical factors could hamper implementation of this decree. It was not decisions of this order that had propelled the aristocratic Greenville native to the top-tier of South Carolina society, and precipitated Nixon to nominate him to the Supreme Court as part of the payback due Senator Strom Thurmond.¹⁴ Even this staunch southern conservative could not hope to maintain racial separation in southern schools.¹⁵

Whilst most of the state's deadlines fell at the beginning of the 1970/1971 school year that fall, two South Carolina school districts were subject to Judge Haynsworth's mid-year desegregation court order. The response of each to the challenge of desegregation differed substantially. Whereas urban Greenville County managed to achieve peaceful compliance with 'grace and style,' rural black-belt Darlington County experienced a wave of resistance. Under the leadership of Jeryl Best, a 41 year-old restaurant owner, the Darlington County Citizens for Freedom of Choice sprung up with the explicit intention of nullifying the court's order through extra-judicial methods. Urging parents to try and enrol their children in their old schools rather than those assigned them by the new desegregation plan, Best implored that failure to achieve

¹⁴ The *State* newspaper of Columbia, S.C., was so incensed that it initially suggested that Judge Haynsworth 'honorably' resign rather than implement the Supreme Court decree, as had one South Carolina federal jurist at the time of the Civil War. See: Race Relations Information Center, *Majority Black School Districts in the 11 Southern States* (July 1970), p. 35, in Hayes Mizell to Leonard Garment (August 4, 1970), 'Current School Desegregation (3 of 3)(CFOA 4698)', Box 77, Garment Files.

¹⁵ Harry Dent to Richard Nixon (December 17, 1969), '510B (Supreme Court, Haynsworth Nomination, 1 of 2)', Box 34, Ehrlichman Files; Levona Page, 'Two S.C. School Districts Prepare For Instant Mixing,' *The State* (February 15, 1970), 'Civil Rights, Education, Desegregation, Greenville & Darlington, 1970 (Folder 3)', Box 106, McNair Papers.

this goal be met with a pupil boycott. In a hint of the aggressive manoeuvres to follow, the Darlington native intimated that economic sanctions would be initiated and picket lines drawn against those local merchants who did not support his 'last ditch' strategy.¹⁶

The week schools opened in Darlington County around 3,000 white students out of the county's 14,000-strong enrolment boycotted classes. Seeking to intensify pressure on the federal authorities, Best invited a number of high profile South Carolina politicians and officials to address a freedom-of-choice rally in Lamar the following Sunday. All but one declined, although it is pertinent to note that the front-runner for the Democratic nomination, Lieutenant Governor John West, apologised that other commitments prevented his attendance, and reiterated his support for the group's philosophy. No state-wide candidate that year was prepared to high-handedly rebuff a 'freedom-of-choice' movement, however pernicious its appearance.

One was determined to solicit its support. The sole high-profile acceptance came from West's prospective opponent for the Governor's chair, Albert Watson: a charismatic, loquacious demagogue who had carved out substantial majorities in South Carolina's Second District by excoriating civil rights, youth demonstrations, and urban unrest. In 1965, for example, he had celebrated re-election to his seat after switching from Democrat to Republican by announcing a probe of national civil rights organisations 'to determine the extent to which they are influenced by or dominated by subversive elements.' For a rabble-rouser like Albert Watson, the situation at Lamar constituted a gold-plated opportunity to rustle up votes in an upstate Democratic stronghold. The editor of the nearby *Hartsville Messenger* contemptuously observed that 'Watson's appearance at the rally lent an air of respectability they didn't have before. He's the only person of consequence who's gotten anywhere near that group.'¹⁷

¹⁶ James Clawson to J.F. Hall (September 24, 1971), 'HU 2-1 / ST 40 Education Schooling / Massachusetts / South Carolina / 1/1/71 - 12/31/72', Box 16, Human Rights Files, NARA; Nordhammer, 'Gas Routs Whites'; 'Many Expected To Boycott Integrated S.C. School', *Fayetteville* (North Carolina) *Observer* (February 16, 1970), Box 106, McNair Papers.

¹⁷ 'Watson To Speak In Lamar', *The State* (February 21, 1970), 'Civil Rights Education, Desegregation, General, 1970 (Folder 4)', Box 106, McNair Papers, USCPC; 'Watson Will Seek Probe Of Civil Rights Groups', *Washington Post* (August 16, 1965); Grieder, 'Lamar School Violence'.

At a press conference in upstate Florence, Watson explained that he would not ‘advise the county’s parents as to what to do with their children, other than urge them to be obedient and not engage in violence.’ After this disclaimer, Watson hit his stride. Ignoring the state’s compulsory attendance law, he argued that parents had the right to a ‘private decision’ when deciding whether to boycott the county’s schools. In what could only be interpreted as a call-to-arms, the Republican argued that, ‘If you will exert enough citizen pressure you can change the laws. The pendulum is beginning to swing back our way.’ Like many southern reactionaries facing judicial mandates with which they disagreed, it was clear that Watson’s comments in Lamar were unlikely to focus too long on the theme of law-and-order. Attorneys for both the Darlington and Greenville County school boards rejected Watson’s ‘freedom-of-choice’ rhetoric as irrelevant and irresponsible.¹⁸

That Sunday afternoon, around 3,000 supporters of Best’s ‘Freedom of Choice’ organisation congregated on Lamar High School football field to hear an array of speakers denounce the recent court order that had brought meaningful school integration into the county. These ranged from the high school’s student body president to a bus driver from the county seat of Darlington. Welcomed by rounds of applause from the audience, Jeryl Best outlined a skeleton plan for an all-white private school system outside federal jurisdiction, and ominously warned that ‘you wait until Monday morning. Lamar will show you what a real boycott is. There won’t be any school here.’ The rapturous reception accorded these remarks was deadly serious. Some Darlington County parents had their children adopted by relatives to avoid schools dominated by black pupils.¹⁹

Having witnessed the raw and ugly face of resistance in the flesh, Watson could have tried to turn back the rebellious tide with calm words from the podium. Instead, he gleefully jumped onto the bandwagon,

‘I know there are those in public office who will say, "Don't make waves. Don't rock the boat. Be quiet about this thing." In fact some would say maybe let's sacrifice Darlington County, sacrifice Greenville County, and maybe it won't happen to the rest of the state. You're deluding

¹⁸ ‘Watson To Speak In Lamar’ & ‘Watson Applauds Choice Supporters’, *Hartsville (South Carolina) Messenger* (February 20, 1970), ‘Civil Rights Education, Desegregation, General, 1970 (Folder 4)’, Box 106, McNair Papers; Bill Hughes, ‘Lamar Incident’; ‘School Attorney: Watson’s Statements Compound Problem’, *Columbia Record* (January 31, 1970), ‘Civil Rights Education, Desegregation, General, 1970 (Folder 1)’, Box 106, McNair Papers.

¹⁹ ‘Watson Applauds Choice Supporters’; Grieder, ‘Lamar School Violence’.

yourselves. Every section of this state is in for it unless you stand up and use every means at your disposal to defend what I consider an illegal order of the Circuit Court of the United States.’²⁰

Watson’s words were moulded out of the rhetoric of Massive Resistance. Centring on the idea that constitutional decrees could be properly nullified by the exercise of the popular will, Watson was similarly non-specific about the forms such resistance might take. Running contrary to his opening remarks in Florence, the phrase ‘every means at your disposal’ implied that a violent response could well be justified to resist what Watson termed ‘an illegal order.’ Eight days later, several hundred local citizens followed this pungent advice to the letter, ‘defending’ their local school from an influx of black students with every weapon at their disposal.

Watson’s emotive speech intended to reap political gain from a crisis in Darlington County’s public education system. Commenting on the speech after the bus riot, Arthur Stanley, local NAACP President, insisted that ‘Watson poured gasoline on the fire.’ The congressman’s legal arguments represented no more than a withered fig-leaf of propriety over reckless rabble-rousing. As the Darlington County school board’s attorney complained to reporters, these arguments had been raised and dismissed at every step of judicial proceedings.²¹

A Region in Crisis: Southern Politics in 1970

Although extreme, Albert Watson’s rabble-rousing style was hardly exceptional in southern politics that year. Senator Richard Russell of Georgia informed Nixon and Agnew that his state’s citizens were more ‘worked up’ over the decision to implement full desegregation mid-school year ‘than they have been in respect to anything else the Senator has seen throughout his public service’ that spanned nearly half-a-century. The Palmetto State was certainly not immune from such revolutionary currents. When White House advisor Pat Buchanan asked a South Carolinian acquaintance how the rulings were being received in the state, his reply

²⁰ ‘Mr Watson And A Faulty Memory’, *The Charlotte Observer* (January 18, 1972).

²¹ Grieder, ‘Lamar School Violence’; ‘School Attorney: Watson’s Statements’ (January 31, 1970).

indicated nothing less than impending crisis. 'I am looking out my window right now at old Ford Sumter out there in the harbor,' reported an impassioned voice down the telephone line from Charleston, 'and if the Federal Government didn't have the atomic bomb we'd be firing on it.' One middle-aged parent from South Carolina told an ally of Lieutenant Governor John West that he was tempted to spread posters of Lester Maddox around his home-town because 'I'm so mad with the actions of our Consolidated School Board that I'm about to chew nails.'²²

Inevitably, prominent politicians down South scrambled to take a convincingly rebellious line on the matter. In Florida, Governor Claude Kirk ignored expert advice to promulgate an executive order prohibiting local superintendents and county school boards from altering their original 1969-1970 pupil assignment plans or increasing their budget to comply with the judicial decrees. In the blunt assessment of Floyd T. Christian, Florida's Commissioner of Education, Kirk was 'making this threat purely for political reasons.' Unsurprisingly, such brash public relations stunts concealed a hollow core. Less than a fortnight after issuing his executive order threat, the Governor's aides were briefing journalists that Kirk was determined to 'stay within the legal system,' and opposed to the idea that southern politicians should 'take a stand in the schoolhouse door or use the ax-handle approach.'²³

A few days later, Kirk travelled even further away from his initial position, and publicly refused to meet with other Dixie governors to discuss the school issue; pointedly observing that 'I'm not a Southern governor. I'm a governor of one of the United States.' Although Kirk's capitulation was particularly extreme, it highlighted the sense that gubernatorial defiance often represented necessary immunisation from the politically adverse effects of presiding over massive school desegregation. Having adopted progressive standpoints on several issues earlier in his term, in 1970 Governor Kirk 'decided that the political advantages of defiance could not

²² Bryce Harlow to Staff Secretary (February 21, 1970), 'HU 2-1 Education - Schooling (1/1/70 - 2/28/70)', Box 9, Human Affairs Files, NARA.; William Safire, *Before The Fall: An Inside View of the Pre-Watergate White House* (Transaction, 2005), p. 234; James T. Tobias to John West (April 24, 1970), 'West, Personal, Camp., 1970, West Gub.l., Organization, Strategy, 1970, July-Oct', Box 19, West Papers.

²³ Floyd T. Christian to Cyril Busbee (January 22, 1970), 'Desegregation, Public Schools, Greenville / Darlington, 1970, General', Box 31, McNair Papers; James K. Batten, 'Today is "Total Integration Day" in Dixie', *Detroit Free Press* (February 1, 1970), 'Civil Rights, Education, Desegregation, General, 1970 (Folder 1)', Box 106, McNair Papers.

be ignored in an election year.' Kirk's own pastor admonished the stand, telling the congregation of St. John's Episcopal Church that the governor had exploited a 'phony issue.'²⁴

Even avowed moderates were not immune to the strong grassroots pressure that coalesced in response to the court orders. Arkansas Governor Winthrop Rockefeller had won election by forming a coalition of white moderates and black voters, and earned renown as one of a few moderate Republicans office-holders in the South more concerned with fostering a progressive business climate than rallying round the flag of defiance against racial integration. At the 1968 Southern Governors Conference, Rockefeller had publicly branded George Wallace 'a demagogue' who deliberately used mistruths to further his own political career. At the Conference a year later, Rockefeller cast one of only three votes against a popular anti-busing amendment.

In the wake of a massive rally held in Arkansas on February 21, 1970, by the United Concerned Citizens of America (UCCA), an organisation that claimed 125,00 supporters nationwide, Rockefeller apparently changed his mind. As the chairman of the Southern Governors' Conference, he quickly arranged for a special session to be convened on February 24, the day before the National Conference of Governors began in Washington D.C. The principal speaker was Dr Mitchell Young, head of the UCCA. It was quite clear that Rockefeller was rather uncomfortable with the whole idea, even predicting that Young's proposals would receive short shrift from the majority of governors nationwide. When asked whether Young had instigated the meeting, reporters noted that Rockefeller 'shifted on his feet uneasily,' and ruefully accorded the self-aggrandising Texas surgeon the credit he demanded. Although Rockefeller promised to contact the National Conference of Governors' Chairman about some form of 'freedom of choice' resolution, Governor John A. Love of Colorado later insisted that he had received no such communication. Lester Maddox explained the whole sorry mess by bluntly stating that Rockefeller had been put 'on the spot' by Arkansas anti-busing zealots.²⁵

²⁴ 'Southern leaders plan strategy sessions', *Wilmington* (North Carolina) *Star* (February 7, 1970), 'Civil Rights, Education, Desegregation, Governors' Meetings, 1970, Alabama', Box 106, McNair Papers; Randy Sanders, *Mighty Peculiar Elections: The New South Gubernatorial Campaigns of 1970 and the Changing Politics of Race* (Louisiana State University Press, 2007), p. 85; Randy Sanders, 'Rassling a Governor', *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, 80:3 (Winter, 2002), p. 351.

²⁵ Bill Goodwin, 'Busing to Divide Governors Confab?', *Atlanta Journal* (February 25, 1970), 'Civil Rights,

As befitting a former restaurant owner who had achieved political notoriety by chasing black patrons away with an axe handle, Governor Lester Maddox was never likely to be outmanoeuvred on school desegregation. Whilst southern moderates like Rockefeller struggled to cope with such a volatile issue, reactionary governors like Maddox and Louisiana's John McKeithen glorified in the political theatre that could be extracted from yet another Lost Cause. On February 17, a number of southern congressional delegations received their executive counterparts on Capitol Hill to plot strategy against the school mandates. Unsurprisingly, the meetings were disastrous since the bulk of attendees were more concerned with passing the buck than organising a united front.²⁶

For Governors Maddox and McKeithen, the lack of real progress behind closed doors was of little consequence, since the real purpose of the trip was public performance. At a press conference that afternoon, McKeithen commenced by bizarrely announcing, 'I'm a big Negro man, myself.' Warming to his theme, the Governor claimed that his appearance that day was motivated by concern for black Louisianans. Having established somewhat tenuous credentials as a racial progressive, McKeithen tore into the North. 'They think we're racist bigots in the South still fighting integration,' harangued the Louisiana governor, 'but when the rest of America has to face up to what's happening to us, they'll help us get justice.' All the while in the background, McKeithen's remarks were punctuated by Maddox proclaiming, 'Lay it on them', and 'Amen!' Finishing his speech with an unforgettable climax, McKeithen exclaimed, 'Hallelujah!' to the amassed throng of southern journalists.²⁷

Education, Desegregation, Governors' Meetings, 1970, Alabama', Box 106, McNair Papers; Levona Page, 'Governors' Attitude: "Wait, See"', *The State* (June 19, 1968); Bob Hurt, '5 Governors Discuss Busing', Atlanta Constitution (February 25, 1970), 'Civil Rights, Education, Desegregation, Governors' Meetings, 1970, Alabama', Box 106, McNair Papers; Warren Weaver, Jr., 'Governors Avoid Busing Issue', *New York Times* (February 26, 1970).

²⁶ This might help to explain John G. Sproat's observation that 'one of the most significant aspects of the entire desegregation crisis was the South's failure as a seciton to undertake a genuinely determined, coordinated, and sustained defense of segregation.' See John G. Sproat, 'Firm Flexibility', p. 169.

²⁷ Dale McFeatters, 'Governors meet, gain little', Post-Herald (Birmingham, AL) (February 18, 1970), 'Civil Rights, Education, Desegregation, Governors' Meetings, 1970, Alabama', Box 106, McNair Papers.

A notable absentee from this old-time revivalist burlesque was Governor Robert McNair of South Carolina. Having attended the morning session behind closed doors, McNair did not stick around for the afternoon briefings. Such behaviour was in keeping with McNair's approach on the school desegregation question, which fused protest through the proper channels with a strong defence of law and order, whatever the judicial dictates. This directly conflicted with Albert Watson's insistence that notionally 'illegal' court orders could be justly defied by the popular will. As a result, whilst Watson was busy soliciting invitations to events ripe for grandstanding defiance, Governor McNair was turning them down as inflammatory distractions from the task at hand.²⁸

When invited to a conference on schools with other Deep South chief executives by Mississippi Gov. John Bell Williams in early February 1970, McNair declined on the basis that he felt such methods would yield scant returns. Several days later, Watson telegrammed Williams to commend his initiative in 'meeting to seek a united front against judicial assaults against our schools,' and implored him to expand the Dixie strategy session to include southern congressional delegations. Unfortunately for Watson, the governors were evidently loath to dilute the public-relations value of their sabre-rattling with contributions from Beltway counterparts, and the South Carolina congressman remained excluded.²⁹

McNair Stands Fast: The Politics of Moderation under Assault

Faced with such illusions of defiance, Governor McNair chose to defy illusion and prepare his state for peaceful compliance with the circuit court's order. Just a day after Judge Haynsworth handed down the school decision, McNair travelled to Greenville. Addressing the whole state, the Governor broadcast a thirty-minute televised address that would receive plaudits nationwide for its moral and political courage. As two reporters from the *Atlanta Constitution* noted, it would have been easy for McNair to 'rattle the Southern

²⁸ The comparisons to his predecessor-but-one, Governor Ernest Hollings, were unavoidable. See Chapter One for further details.

²⁹ 'Douglas Mauldin, 'McNair Won't Meet With Dixie Governors', Greenville News (February 7, 1970) Watson Commends Williams', The State (Columbia) (February 8, 1970) – both 'Civil Rights, Education, Desegregation, Governors' Meetings, 1970, Alabama', Box 106, McNair Papers.

sabre again, to roll the eye and invoke the old clichés, the old war cries.’ Instead, he issued a plea that appealed to South Carolina’s sense of propriety and not a little pragmatism. The key passage widely printed across the nation proclaimed that,

‘We’ve run out of courts, and we’ve run out of time, and we must adjust to new circumstances...I will oppose any attempt to close down public schools. The only way South Carolina is going to grow is through its educational programs...We’ve seen what defiance will lead to. We saw in Arkansas when Gen. Eisenhower sent the troops in. We saw it in Alabama and Mississippi. I don’t think the people of my state would want me to defy the order of the court after we’ve run the course legally. We don’t want federal troops in South Carolina. We’ve built a reputation of obedience to the law.’³⁰

McNair’s respect for the integrity of the judicial process was particularly noteworthy given the alternatives espoused by politicians like Albert Watson. The *Charlotte Observer* positively contrasted the Governor’s ‘mature, calm and responsible’ response with Watson’s ‘playing to the political galleries.’ A *Miami Herald* editorial gracefully conceded that ‘Florida might not have thought it could learn anything about human dignity and law and order from a speech made in Greenville, S.C.’ but that the Governor’s speech provided a ‘needed lesson’ to the entire country.³¹

National commentators greeted McNair’s words with similar warmth. On ABC News, Howard K. Smith announced that ‘now is the time for all good men to praise Governor Robert E. McNair of South Carolina.’ Observing that ‘a statesman is a man who has the courage to sacrifice the short view to make history say that is what all our leaders should have done,’ Smith concluded his piece by pronouncing ‘Governor McNair’s words’ as ‘those of a statesman.’ The South Carolina governor, so castigated by liberals and African-Americans alike in the wake of the Orangeburg Massacre two years earlier, now drew plaudits from unlikely quarters. Maynard Jackson, the first black vice-mayor elect of Atlanta, told a South Carolina audience that ‘what we need in the South is men who have the guts of your governor.’ The day after the Greenville speech,

³⁰ Jack Bass, ‘Governor Urges South Carolina to Accept Integration Rulings,’ *Los Angeles Times* (January 28, 1970), ‘Civil Rights, Education, Desegregation, Greenville & Darlington, 1970 (Folder 1)’, Box 106, McNair Papers.

³¹ ‘McNair’s Stand Strong, Sensible’, *The Charlotte Observer* (January 29, 1970), ‘Civil Rights, Education, Desegregation, General, 1970 (Folder 1)’, & ‘South Carolina Sees It’, *The Miami Herald* (February 2, 1970), ‘Civil Rights, General, 1970’: both in Box 106, McNair Papers.

Senator Edward Kennedy wrote to congratulate McNair for his ‘realistic and courageous stand.’ As an afterthought, the doyen of national liberalism attached a handwritten postscript: ‘I hope some of us can be as courageous in the North.’³²

One correspondent understood all too well the dilemma confronting McNair. On January 31, 1970, Ernest Hollings, the junior senator from South Carolina, composed a complimentary letter lamenting that other southern governors ‘lack the broad vision you have evidenced.’ Although not personally close, Governor McNair's positive leadership in the face of unpopular federal mandates created a unique kinship between the two. In his final weeks as governor seven years earlier, Hollings had successfully urged the South Carolina state legislature to obey an impending court order shattering the colour line in the state’s education system. In rhetoric McNair consciously borrowed in 1970, Hollings explained that the state was ‘running out of courts,’ and proposed that when all legal avenues had been exhausted, ‘the General Assembly make clear South Carolina's choice, a government of laws rather than a government of men.’³³ As an editorial in the Boston *Herald-Traveler* astutely observed, Hollings and McNair’s decisions to comply offered ‘little political favour, but both were sufficiently perceptive to see tragedy in the alternative.’ Although ensconced in Washington, Hollings could well imagine the type of pressure that bore down on McNair. Sympathising that ‘the mail is heavy and there is little a governor can do,’ Hollings offered his wholehearted support for McNair’s ‘strong stand.’³⁴

White South Carolina generally proved less keen on Governor McNair’s stance. Whereas the story featured on the front page of the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *Charlotte Observer*, McNair's speech was relegated to the back page of the *Greenville News*. For many in the South, McNair’s calm words symbolised

³² ‘Commentary by Howard K. Smith, ABC News’ (January 29, 1970), ‘Desegregation, Public Schools, Greenville / Darlington, 1970, General’, Box 31, McNair Papers; ‘Familiar Phrases Said Racism Code’, *Spartanburg Herald Journal* (February 14, 1970), ‘Civil Rights, General, 1970’, Box 106, McNair Papers; Edward Kennedy to Robert McNair (January 28, 1970), ‘Desegregation, Public Schools, Greenville / Darlington, 1970, Reaction Letters, January 1-28’, Box 31, McNair Papers.

³³ See Chapter One for further details.

³⁴ Ernest Hollings to Robert McNair (January 31, 1970), ‘Desegregation, Public Schools, Greenville / Darlington, 1970, Reaction Letters, General’, Box 31, McNair Papers, USCPC; ‘Reality in Carolina’, *Boston Herald-Traveler* (February 3, 1970), ‘Civil Rights Education, Desegregation, General, 1970 (Folder 4)’, Box 106, McNair Papers.

not courage, but treacherous surrender to a punitive enemy. Speaking on WRAL-TV in North Carolina, right-wing ideologue Jesse Helms fulminated about Governor McNair's decision 'to sit out the remainder of the fight.' White South Carolinians generally shared Helms' views. The Governor's office received thousands of telegrams and letters, of which only a fraction were complimentary. One protesting petition from Greenville boasted more than eleven thousand signatures. The intensity of feeling against McNair's stand was quite striking. Some correspondents even suggested that McNair's apparent national ambitions had subverted his response to the school desegregation crisis: one anonymous writer cumbersomely addressed the South Carolina Governor as 'Mr. Lyndon Baines, Lady Bird, Robert Kennedy, Hubert Humphrey, Anti-Spiro National Democrat McNair.' Such names were not complimentary in the Palmetto State.

Echoing the theme, a resident of Darlington County bluntly declaimed McNair 'a Communist and a traitor,' and demanded to know 'what job have you been promised in Washington after your term has ended?' As McNair continued to stand resolute, so correspondence became increasingly desperate. Hundreds of local parents signed a petition declaring themselves 'concerned to the point of hysteria over what is fast becoming complete destruction of our education system.' The hyperbole that infused such letters was mocked by McNair's staff. When it snowed in Columbia a week after the speech, one aide composed a fake telegram from an 'irate citizen' that succinctly announced, 'Strongly oppose enforcing snowing. Prevent disaster – stand up and be counted against northern Snow. Give us freedom of choice weather.'³⁵

White South Carolinians were angered that their chief executive failed to echo widespread anger against the judicial orders. Certainly, McNair's moderation stood in sharp contrast to the gothic theatre offered up by other southern governors. A group bizarrely named 'Americans for all Americans' demanded that McNair join McKeithen, Maddox and other fire-breathing governors in 'denouncing such orders and to join with

³⁵ Jack Bass & Marilyn W. Thompson, *Strom: The Complicated Personal and Political Life of Strom Thurmond* (Public Affairs, 2005), p. 235; Jesse Helms, 'WRAL-TV Viewpoint' (February 3, 1970), 'Desegregation, Public Schools, Greenville / Darlington, 1970, Reaction Letters, Feb 3-5', Box 31, McNair Papers; Robert Gordon, 'McNair Has Faced Abuse But Never Like This', *Charlotte Observer* (February 2, 1970), 'Civil Rights, Education, Desegregation, Greenville & Darlington, 1970 (Folder 1)', Box 106, McNair Papers.

them in whatever steps are necessary to bring about the rights of all people in this respect.' In a similar vein, McNair recalled that a local druggist advised him to ape Lester Maddox by buying an axe-handle and waving it around whilst defaming the Supreme Court. As the beleaguered Governor wryly pointed out to one inquisitive southern journalist, 'I could have done that and I'd be a lot more popular around the state, at least for now.' With foresight, McNair realised that a course of demagoguery would mean that the white backlash was only delayed, not denied. 'We've run out of courts, and we've run out of time' signalled that the Governor was ready to leave the last ditch of defiance and 'adjust to new circumstances.'³⁶

Despite the opprobrium his stance attracted, the Governor refused to budge an inch. This was typical of an individual whose sense of self was entirely rooted in law enforcement. In retirement, McNair would principally socialise with former policemen. Prominent South Carolinian Robert Davis recalled that the Governor could be 'tough...[here] was a man who at one time rolled tanks up to a school administration building and told the students, "I'll give you so many minutes to get out."' What made this toughness stand out was McNair's insistence that law and order applied to all sections of society. Addressing pungent hypocrisy amongst ultra-conservatives like Thurmond who were simultaneously obsessed with resisting judicial desegregation mandates and demanding social order, McNair observed that 'all of us have for years talked about law and order and respect for the law.' As such, he concluded, 'we have to subscribe to this policy now. Defiance is not the way of South Carolina.' The unspoken assumption was that a small coterie of establishment figures, not the outrage of reactionary white citizens, would define the state's response to this particular crisis of race-relations, just as it had seven years earlier.³⁷

The Democratic establishment in South Carolina shared McNair's profound contempt for the politics of resistance practised by southern demagogues. Rembert Dennis, an influential veteran Democratic state

³⁶ Telegram from Harold J. Newton on behalf of 'Americans for all Americans' to Robert McNair (February 16, 1970), 'Desegregation, Public Schools, Greenville / Darlington, 1970, Petitions', Box 31, McNair Papers; Robert Gordon, 'McNair Has Faced Abuse'.

³⁷ Interview with Robert C. Davis (September 25, 1979), Interview 1/12/1, McNair Oral History Project, p. 19; Robert Gordon, 'McNair Has Faced Abuse'.

senator, publicly insisted that any legislative action taken in the South Carolina Assembly should not be taken 'as a panacea for the great troubles which beset us in education in this state.' Expanding on his point, Dennis observed that a recent freedom-of-choice amendment 'offers no substitute for court orders, and it holds out no hopes to the immediate problems of Greenville and Darlington counties, but at least it is what we think should be the law of the land.' Top-level state officials similarly had little time for legal resistance solely designed to burnish politicians' reputations rather than properly address the issues at hand. Shortly before Judge Haynsworth issued his judicial order in late January, Georgia's attorney general asked his counterpart in South Carolina to join Governor Lester Maddox's suit against Secretary Finch demanding national enforcement of school desegregation. Having assessed the lawsuit for McNair's benefit, attorney general Daniel McLeod characterised it 'a political question' that would have little likelihood of immediate success. 'One very valid consideration,' McLeod concluded pointedly, 'is the fact of your participating with Governor Maddox.' Whilst establishment figures protested against these desegregation decrees, they were simply not prepared to become embroiled in irresponsible grandstanding. In short, McNair had begun to renew the 'conspiracy of peace.'³⁸

Presidential Politics and South Carolina Party Battles

Whereas South Carolina Republicans blamed the state's Democratic administration for not resisting school desegregation vigorously enough, Robert McNair identified Nixon's 1968 presidential campaign as a key factor in exacerbating public uproar on the issue. Writing to Strom Thurmond, McNair pointedly reminded the Senator that South Carolinians 'were assured that there would be a return to freedom of choice in the campaign of 1968 and our school officials were counselled to take no further action and await better treatment from the new Administration.' Instead, McNair observed, the judiciary was now implementing plans 'insisted on and approved by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare' under Nixon's control. Twisting the knife, he pointedly recalled that, in spite of the Mississippi case the year before, 'at no time has

³⁸ 'School Bills Offered In Both Houses', *The News and Courier* (February 11, 1970), 'Civil Rights, Education, Desegregation, General, 1970 (Folder 3)', Box 106, McNair Papers; Wayne Corley to Robert McNair, 'Greenville School Situation' (January 26, 1970), 'Desegregation, Public Schools, General, 1970, Notes', Box 31, McNair Papers.

[the Attorney General], the Secretary of HEW or the President, for that matter, spoken out for the preservation of or a return to freedom of choice since the election.' To try and mitigate the white South's expectations of reprieve from desegregation to secure its ballots on election day. McNair accused state Republicans of producing 'an odor of political demagoguery which envelopes like a smokescreen the 1968 national campaign promises.'³⁹

Governor McNair's rhetoric made for good politics. On January 26, McNair forwarded petitions, letters and telegrams signed by around 100,000 South Carolinian citizens to President Nixon as evidence of widespread concern that the mid-year desegregation order would precipitate 'great disruption and confusion and the destruction of quality education.' A week later, McNair forwarded another batch of similar correspondence 'because I feel your office has more authority to satisfy these complaints.' In return, a member of Vice President Agnew's executive office wrote back to frostily observe 'the constitutional separation of powers' between the presidency and the judiciary, and suggest that state authorities 'endeavour to secure a prompt and speedy review' of the desegregation rulings. Nevertheless, McNair continued to press the point. Speaking at the annual Jackson Day dinner in the early months of 1970, the Governor provoked 'wild cheers' when he blasted the 'ineffective' Nixon Administration, observing that 'the American people were led to believe that a change in administrations would lead to solutions and would provide answers to many difficult problems...The promises of 1968 are beginning to sound hollow.'⁴⁰

McNair's attitude was influenced by more than pure political calculation. Robert S. Davis, a prominent figure in the state Democratic establishment and president of a committee that sought to promote responsible reaction to massive school desegregation, later recalled that the Republicans' exploitation of the school issue

³⁹ 'Governor Castigated Unfairly For Stand', *The Easley Progress* (February 4, 1970), 'Desegregation, Public Schools, General, 1970', Box 31, McNair Papers; Robert McNair to Strom Thurmond (January 28, 1970), 'Desegregation, Public Schools, Greenville / Darlington, 1970, General', Box 31, McNair Papers. The 'more symbolic than substantive' quotation is from Dean Kotlowksi, *Nixon's Civil Rights* (Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 38.

⁴⁰ Robert McNair to Richard Nixon (January 26, 1970 & February 2, 1970) & Nils A. Boe to Robert McNair (January 28, 1970): both in 'Desegregation, Public Schools, Greenville / Darlington, 1970, General', Box 31, McNair Papers; Bob Pope, 'Gov. M'Nair Blasts Nixon', *Chattanooga Free Press* (January 29, 1970), 'Civil Rights, Education, Desegregation, General, 1970 (Folder 1)', Box 106, McNair Papers.

infuriated and offended McNair's sensibilities. Davis' recollection is substantiated by archival evidence. When Wayne Seal, the administration's press secretary, reported that John Mitchell planned to place more responsibility for desegregation on southern-state Democratic regimes to foster a positive 'political climate' for Republican gains in the elections later that year, McNair scrawled an angry response in pen at the bottom of the memo. 'This is typical of the actions of this crowd from the beginning,' fumed the Governor, 'They are nothing but "political animals" & will exploit any issue.'⁴¹

This comment likely referred to both the Nixon Administration and Watson alike. In the wake of the Lamar bus riot, Governor McNair had telephoned up the Justice Department and let 'all the Berkeley County come out of him' in an angry response over the Department's refusal to enforce a federal court order. In McNair's mind, Watson and the Nixon Administration's strategy of exploiting racial tension for political gain was indistinguishable. Certainly, the White House and the Republican gubernatorial candidate enjoyed close relations that mirrored McNair's former ties to President Lyndon Johnson. Back in 1960, Watson had headed up S.C. Democrats for Nixon-Lodge, and had spoken throughout the state on behalf of the Republican ticket. Eight years later, Watson became an early supporter of a Nixon and one of the first signatories on a congressional petition urging the Californian to run that year. Once Nixon received the nomination, Watson campaigned throughout the South on his behalf, including a rather daredevil appearance in George Wallace's home state of Alabama. The Washington D.C. press corps even observed this South Carolina Republican change his mind at House voting roll calls on instruction from Nixon Administration legislative liaisons.⁴²

Watson was firmly in the Nixon camp, and rewarded accordingly. When he vacillated over whether to give up his safe congressional seat and a chance at federal retirement on a generous pension in order to run for the

⁴¹ Interview with Robert S. Davis, p. 13 & Wayne Seal to Robert McNair (April 3, 1970), 'Desegregation, Public Schools, General, 1970', Box 31, McNair Papers.

⁴² Interview with Robert S. Davis, p. 13; Albert Watson to Richard Nixon (May 5, 1970), 'South Carolina Politics' (January - December, 1970)', Box 6, Dent Papers; Harry Dent to Fred Malek, 'Reasons for Nominating Albert Watson for the ICC' (April 16, 1971), 'Watson, Albert (January - November, 1971)', Box 11, Dent Papers; Mack Flaming to John West (August 14, 1970), 'Watson, Albert (1 of 2)', Box 20, West Papers.

Governor's Chair, President Nixon personally told Watson that he would 'take care of him' if he lost the following November. Even after Watson's role in the Lamar bus riot, and his subsequent refusal to apologise, Nixon ordered that the congressman be assigned a 'good position' within the Administration in the event of a Democratic win in November, and repeated the message to Watson during a White House photo shoot. Whilst Governor McNair himself enjoyed good personal relations with Nixon,⁴³ he could not stand the national Administration's flagrant politicking on a question he believed transcended party loyalty. When Administration officials interviewed McNair about his views on school desegregation in early 1970, he was recorded as expressing 'concern that there were conflicting interpretations of the president's statements on school desegregation and that these varying interpretations were creating confusion in the public mind.' One very obvious 'conflicting interpretation' was Nixon's support for a man whose racial outlook was so reactionary that, in the *Charlotte Observer's* biting assessment, 'it can only be said that [Watson] had not been as crude in his appeal as Cole Blease, Cotton Ed Smith and Ben Tillman once were.'⁴⁴

The President's continued support for Albert Watson was typical of an attitude towards the South that, in the memorable words of two *Atlanta Constitution* journalists, 'resembled the walk of a drunken sailor.' Whilst favouring Watson, the White House shunned with equal vigour the proposed defection of Lester Maddox to the Republican Party. The Georgia GOP was keen to embrace the axe-wielding segregationist with open arms, since they realised the 'immediate benefits in the State': not least because Maddox was, at the time, considered unbeatable in Georgia. Nevertheless, Harry Dent insisted that Governor Maddox be rebuffed due to the 'national implications' that such a manoeuvre would entail; implications that inevitably included Maddox's widespread reputation as a racist demagogue. Having embraced one segregationist former Democrat in Albert Watson, the Nixon White House rejected another cast from the same rabble-rousing

⁴³ In June 1970 Nixon invited Governor McNair to sit on his Presidential Fact-Finding Commission on Vietnam. A month later, the President wrote to McNair to enclose a recent report on the Cambodia mission; adding with genuine warmth on the end of the letter, 'P.S. It was good to see you yesterday. I hope you found our meeting as useful as I did.' See folder marked 'Presidential Fact-Finding Commission, 1970, Vietnam, Armed Services' in Box 31, McNair Papers.

⁴⁴ Harry Dent to Fred Malek, 'Reasons for Nominating Albert Watson'; Harry Dent to Harry Flemming (July 23, 1970), 'Flemming Memos' (June - July, 1970)', Box 4, Dent Papers; Harry S. Dent, *The Prodigal South Returns to Power* (John Wiley & Sons, 1978), p. 142; 'Watson Begins On Narrow Footing, *Charlotte Observer* (March 24, 1970), 'Clippings, 1969-1970, Campaign, Persons, Watson, Albert', Box 20, West Papers.

mould. Watson's longstanding loyalty to Nixon made the difference, but the Administration's relationship with him would become increasingly anachronistic as the school desegregation drama unfolded in 1970.⁴⁵

The White House's divergent response to Watson and Maddox epitomised the Administration's schizophrenic response to the school desegregation question. Even after affirming its commitment to enforcing the *Alexander* decision, the Nixon Administration had continued to evade a strong, positive position on the issue of school integration. Within three weeks of the Supreme Court mandating 'integration now,' HEW's Office for Civil Rights had issued letters to eight majority-black districts in South Carolina ordering them to present a desegregation plan by mid-December that could be implemented before the new year. Enforcement proceedings were initiated against five school districts, including two in South Carolina. In total, over three hundred school districts region-wide were subject to immediate new compliance efforts by the Department.⁴⁶

Despite such enforcement activity, Nixon loyalists within HEW continued to present the department as merely passive actors in enforcing broad judicial mandates. In December 1969, Pete Page, regional director of HEW in Atlanta, was removed from his post for irritating one too many southern Republican grandees. His replacement evinced rather more lenience towards white recalcitrance. In an interview with the *Washington Post* on December 15, 1969, Cary Hall parroted the absurd view that HEW did not advocate busing, and any desegregation plans incorporating this technique 'is the result either of court orders or local decisions.' The three-hundred school districts served with notice of new enforcement action over the previous few weeks would also have been surprised to hear that 'the government doesn't say' that there must be integration.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Harry Dent to John Mitchell (March 14, 1970), '1970 Memos to Cabinet Members', Box 4, Dent Files; Tom Lias to Harry Dent (March 17, 1970), '1970 Memos to Haldeman', Box 3, Dent Files; Hal Gulliver & Reg Murphy, *The Southern Strategy* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), p. 46.

⁴⁶ Hastings Wyman to Pat Gray (November 21, 1969) & Leon Panetta to Pat Gray (November 14, 1969): both in 'Civil Rights: 1969, November 13-30', Box 3, Finch Papers; Leon Panetta to Robert Finch, 'Efforts by HEW to Assist School Districts Required to Desegregate by February 1, 1970' (January 29, 1970), 'Desegregation - Title VI Compliance (CFOA 5019)', Box 81, Leonard Garment Files.

⁴⁷ Bruce Galphin, 'HEW Official Stresses Quality Not Integration', *Washington Post* (December 16, 1969).

'Fuzzing it up': A White House Torn Between Policy and Politics

This conflict between rhetorical lenience and hard enforcement action played out in the joint HEW-Justice ad-hoc coordinating committee on school desegregation. HEW officials expressed severe unhappiness at Justice's politically-savvy proposal to 'fuzz it up' and place as much blame on school boards as possible when framing plans. For their part, Justice remained deeply sceptical about HEW's ability to produce politically acceptable results. When Pat Gray told Frank Dunbaugh, a senior Justice Department attorney, that HEW educators 'could not live' with Justice's plans for school desegregation, a frustrated Dunbaugh retorted that, 'maybe we ought to go more in [the] direction of acting like a master.'⁴⁸

Such schemes were mere fantasy. Whilst civil rights bureaucrats now held clear marching orders from the courts, there still existed no coherent plan for enforcement. The ad-hoc committee failed to standardise plans in a fashion acceptable to the White House's political proclivities. Even Leonard appeared confused about the committee's role. The 'basic principles' applicable across the board that he desired in the fall of 1969 soon gave way to an acceptance that the committee needed 'to decide on a case-by-case method.' Some plans were not even submitted to Washington for approval. In mid-December 1969, Jerris Leonard reported from Alabama that he was 'catching all kinds of hell re[garding] plans filed here' and could not work out 'how they were filed' without some sort of intervention by more senior officials. The response from Title IV was that the majority were cleared by HEW's regional office in Atlanta, which clearly undermined the whole purpose of standardisation for which the ad-hoc committee in Washington was formed.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Meeting Notes, Civil Rights Coordinating Committee (November 24, 1969) & Telephone Conversation between Pat Gray & Frank Dunbaugh (November 19, 1969): both in 'Civil Rights: 1969, November 13-30', Box 3, Finch Papers.

⁴⁹ Meeting Notes, Civil Rights Coordinating Committee (October 14, 1969), 'Civil Rights: 1969, October', Telephone Conversation between Pat Gray & Jerris Leonard (November 19, 1969), 'Civil Rights: 1969, November 13-30' & Untitled Meeting Notes, 'TCW J. Leonard' (December 10, 1969), 'Civil Rights: 1969, December 1-18': all in Box 3, Finch Papers.

The arrival of the new year brought renewed pressure from the White House for political considerations to influence policy-making within federal agencies. With important mid-term elections only ten months away, Nixon instructed his Cabinet to fight the White House's corner whenever necessary. When George Wallace appeared on CBS' 'Face The Nation' on the last Sunday in January, the Alabamian specifically warned President Nixon away from hard-line enforcement of school desegregation on three separate occasions, and threatened to initiate rallies and petition drives if Nixon did not address the question in acceptable fashion during his upcoming State of the Union address. To Harry Dent's horror, one of Wallace's main lines of attack was 'Finch, Finch, Finch---every quote available and all tied to the President.' On receiving Dent's concerned memo on the matter, Nixon immediately ordered Secretary Finch to compose a comprehensive rebuttal of the Wallace's charges. The President's attention was consistently drawn to the school issue during the early months of 1970. Just days before the Wallace appearance on 'Face The Nation,' Bryce Harlow received a second letter in a fortnight on the issue from Fletcher Thompson, a Nixon ally and Georgia congressman. Enclosing a Nixon campaign advert from 1968 on 'freedom of choice' desegregation plans, Congressman Thompson even suggested lines the President could use when discussing school desegregation. 'Please see that this gets to the President!' Thompson wailed, 'Nothing is more important to the South!'⁵⁰

Instead of issuing a clear statement, the White House initially chose to keep quiet and indulge in symbolic acts of support for the white South whilst the machinery of government continued to dismantle its dual school system root-and-branch. The proxy for Nixon's public-relations offensive was the Stennis Amendment: a cunning legislative proposal mooted by Senator John Stennis of Mississippi mandating that the federal government equalise civil rights enforcement across the nation. The Amendment was extremely popular down South. In South Carolina it was co-sponsored by Senators Hollings and Thurmond, and praised by McNair as 'a significant first step toward eliminating discriminatory treatment of the South.' More

⁵⁰ John Ehrlichman to Robert Finch (January 9, 1970), 'PI - 4-4: White House', Box 518, Office of Education Files, NARA; Bob Haldeman to Richard Nixon (c. January 1970) 'HU 2-1 Education - Schooling (1/1/70 - 2/28/70)', Box 9, Human Affairs Files, NARA; Susan Reincke to Bryce Harlow, 'Telephone Call from Congressman Fletcher Thompson: Friday, January 16' (January 16, 1970) & Fletcher Thompson to Bryce Harlow (January 27, 1970), 'HU 2-1 Education - Schooling (1/1/70 - 2/28/70)', Box 9, Human Affairs Files, NARA.

surprising was a groundswell of northern liberal support for the measure. In an intellectually honest, if politically naïve, manoeuvre, Senator Abraham Ribicoff of Connecticut, himself a former HEW Secretary, backed the measure: alleging ‘monumental hypocrisy’ on the part of northerners who perpetuated segregation in their own backyard whilst attacking Jim Crow down South. Whilst historically accurate in its identification of endemic segregation in northern metropolises, the Stennis Amendment was really designed to dilute federal efforts to desegregate southern schools.⁵¹

The White House had little concern with the Amendment’s intended consequences. Instead, Nixon was keen to place on record his sympathies for the white South’s sense of plight without defying court orders directly, just as he had done during the 1968 campaign. As the President privately explained to Senator Richard Russell of Georgia, the Stennis Amendment was ‘largely philosophical and would not have too much practical effect.’ Even Administration conservatives understood the practical realities that lay behind the White House’s ambivalent stance on the school question. At the National Conference of Governors, held just a few days before Nixon met with Senator Russell, Bryce Harlow and Robert Mardian had ‘expressed sympathy for [the South’s] problems,’ but also quietly instructed John Bell Williams of Mississippi that his suggestions for school desegregation reform were ‘politically impossible if not feasible under present court orders.’ Nevertheless, President Nixon’s advisors were intent on accruing as much political capital from the Stennis Amendment as possible. On February 12, 1970, the headline of the *Columbia Record* read ‘White House Renders South Full Support.’ The article bore the fingerprints of Harry Dent, as did the picture below of Albert Watson announcing his candidacy for the Republican gubernatorial nomination. It was no coincidence that Watson chose to announce on the same day his allies in the White House released a statement supporting the thrust of the Stennis Amendment.⁵²

⁵¹ ‘McNair Praises Stennis, Hollings and Ribicoff’, *Greenwood (South Carolina) Index Journal* (February 19, 1970), ‘Civil Rights Education, Desegregation, General, 1970 (Folder 4)’, Box 106, McNair Papers.

⁵² Bryce Harlow to Staff Secretary (February 21, 1970); Bill Coppenbarger, ‘JBW Gets No Encouragement From Top Slot’, (Jackson) *Daily News* (February 25, 1970), ‘Civil Rights, Education, Desegregation, Governors’ Meetings, 1970, Alabama’, Box 106, McNair Papers; Paul Hope, ‘Bitter South Carolina Gubernatorial Race Likely’, *Washington Star* (February 20, 1970), ‘West, Clippings, 1969-1970, Campaign, General, 1969-1970, Sept.’, Box 40, West Papers. For a detailed examination of the fascinating politics involved in the Stennis Amendment, see Joseph Crespino, ‘The Best Defense Is a Good Offense: The Stennis Amendment and the Fracturing of Liberal School Desegregation Policy, 1964-

On February 18, 1970, the Cabinet convened to plan the White House's response to an issue that had reached 'boiling' point in Congress. The political climate in Washington D.C. was so fraught that *Time Magazine* even proclaimed the 'End of Reconstruction' a fortnight later. Nixon's Cabinet was bitterly divided on an appropriate response. When President Nixon asked John Mitchell which side he had taken on the Stennis Amendment, the Attorney General replied that he had assumed a position 'in the right place; right in the middle.' On hearing such cynical prevarication, George Schultz, the Secretary of Labor and an avowed moderate on race, appealed to Nixon's sense of *realpolitik*. 'Don't you know that old proverb?', Schultz demanded, 'He who walks in the middle of the road gets hit from both sides.' President Nixon evidently did not. Aware of the cross-cutting political currents involved in the Stennis Amendment, Nixon quixotically explained to Bryce Harlow that, 'There are two different versions of that amendment; John's for both, and I'm for Old John.' Such calculated obfuscation reflected the President's broader dilemma on school desegregation. Whilst privately accepting his 'responsibilities to adhere to the law of the land as interpreted by the Court,' Nixon had also signalled his intention to publicly 'indicate that we are separating from the majority of the Supreme Court.'⁵³

To pursue these broadly incompatible impulses, the White House indulged in some rather awkward rhetorical gymnastics. On February 12, 1970, Ron Ziegler, Nixon's press secretary, was handed the unenviable task of explaining the Administration's position on the Stennis Amendment to the White House press corps. Deploying the language previously used by congressional moderates to neutralise vigorous anti-busing proposals, Ziegler rather meaninglessly announced that Nixon supported the Amendment to the extent that it 'would advance equal application of the law.' As Haldeman wryly commented about the debacle, Ziegler's brief was to explain that 'we were against the Stennis amendment, even though we were for it in concept.' The whole affair was summed up by a confused, and confusing, question from one reporter about how Nixon

1972', *Journal of Policy History* 18.3 (2006): 304-325.

⁵³ 'Nation: End of Reconstruction', *Time* (March 2, 1970); Jim Keogh, 'Cabinet Meeting, February 18, 1970' (February 18, 1970), 'Beginning February 15, 1970', Box 80, President's Office Files, NARA; William Safire, *Before The Fall*, p. 238; Bryce Harlow to Staff Secretary (February 13, 1970), Folder 2, Nixon-HEW Files, NARA.

could 'endorse uniform application if he has the two different types of integration and opposes bussing in the North and is in favor of maintaining the uniform application of the law?' Newsmen were not the only people on Capitol Hill baffled by Ziegler's announcement. Even Hugh Scott, Republican Minority Leader in the Senate, required clarification from Bryce Harlow about just what exactly the Nixon White House advocated.⁵⁴

Senator Scott would eventually work out the Administration's agenda. Briefing a reporter from *Newsweek's* Atlanta bureau, Scott confided that 'the White House gave aid and comfort to the Stennis Amendment and then, when it saw that it might pass, made an effort to stop it and then scuttled that very effort almost at the last moment.' Scott's assessment was spot on. In a candid memo to the Oval Office, Bryce Harlow described the Administration's position on schools as 'a calculated waffle.' The President was still attempting to carve out a politically viable space between the southern strategy and acceptance that he had no option but to enforce the *Alexander* decision, however 'childish and irresponsible' he might consider it. Such a contorted compromise could not hold fast for long.⁵⁵

The point was argued by Pat Buchanan in typically robust fashion. Astutely noting that the Administration's stand on the school desegregation question 'has a little something in it for everybody,' Buchanan fulminated that such ambiguity 'is not leadership; it is not direction; it is...an attempt to develop a pretty abstract structure which seems to fit every need.' Striking at the heart of the dilemma facing the Administration, Buchanan insisted that 'What the country, North and South, wants to know is what the President intends to do when local, state and Federal courts -- and the Supreme Court -- accept or impose plans that trample all

⁵⁴ 'News Conference at the White House (Key Biscayne, Florida) with Ron Ziegler' (February 12, 1970); William Safire *Before The Fall*, p. 238; Bryce Harlow to Hugh Scott (February 17, 1970), '314 Committee on Educational Quality (1 of 2)', Box 30, Ehrlichman Files.

⁵⁵ Shaffer to Kosher, 'Congress / School', 'School Desegregation - Jan Feb 70', Box 11, 'School Desegregation, 1954-1970', *Newsweek* Atlanta Bureau Records; Bryce Harlow to Richard Nixon, 'Desegregation Statement' (February 23, 1970), 'HU 2-1 Education - Schooling (1/1/70 - 2/28/70)', Box 9, Human Affairs File, NARA; Patrick Buchanan, 'Notes from Legislative Leadership Meeting' (February 17, 1970), 'Beginning February 15, 1970', Box 80, President's Office Files.

over the President's philosophy....Until we confront that central issue...we are talking up a tree.' Undoubtedly, Buchanan's own personal perspective on this question was avowedly reactionary. Whatever the merits of his attitude on school desegregation, though, Buchanan was right to identify just how ambiguous and confusing had become the Administration's own position on the issue. He was also not the only White House staffer to wonder what Nixon would do when the time arrived to take a stand and outline a position.⁵⁶

Reaching a Time for Choosing

Rather bizarrely, the event that eventually forced the White House's hand was neither a judicial ruling nor a political crisis. Instead, an appearance by Vice President Spiro Agnew in Atlanta slated for late February 1970 seemed to present the perfect opportunity to outline a major new direction in Administration policy. For his part, Nixon wholeheartedly agreed with Buchanan's prescription for action without delay. But which pathway would the President choose? Pat Buchanan's prescription for the speech to initiate 'a historic turning point, away from all-out integration plans, with recognition they don't work,' initially provided an attractive option for the President. In Buchanan's own words, his text contained 'the bill of particulars against any more compulsory integration, anywhere in the country at this point in time.'

Justifying this stance to the President, Buchanan memorably wrote an epitaph to civil rights reform. 'The second era of Re-Construction is over,' announced Buchanan, 'the ship of Integration is going down; it is not our ship; it belongs to national liberalism -- and we cannot salvage it; and we ought not to be aboard.' Warming to his theme, Buchanan even suggested that 'the language of *Brown* [v. Board of Education] is too much,' and that Administration could only 'live with' Judge Briggs' infamous doctrine, much-loved by white segregationists, that construed the *Brown* decision as only forbidding legal separation. Buchanan concluded that the speech would provide Nixon with the 'time to move the distance we have to move which is

⁵⁶ Patrick Buchanan to John Ehrlichman (March 4, 1970), 'HU 2-1 Education - Schooling (1/3/70 - 3/30/70)', Box 9, Human Affairs File, NARA.

essentially to a qualified freedom of choice posture.’ Such a strategy would have been received with rapture amongst white southerners.⁵⁷

Nixon instinctively favoured Buchanan’s line of argument over Garment, whom he considered ‘emotionally (no matter how hard he tries) committed to a course which the President does not agree with and he reads with and talks to those who are overwhelmingly so committed.’ On February 4, 1970, Nixon read a short summary of an article by Alexander Bickel lamenting the sad, unintended consequences of school desegregation. Convinced by Bickel’s argument, the President advised John Ehrlichman that he had ‘decided to reverse this process. We will take heat from the professional civil righters -- but education comes first. I want Panetta’s resignation on my desk Monday (as a starter).’ Next to a quote from Bickel urging that the nation ‘try to proceed with education’ instead of social engineering, Nixon continued, ‘This is my decision. If there are those in the Administration who disagree they can resign.’ Such a violent outburst was typical of Nixon’s hot temper, although the passage of time tended to infuse such reactionary views with a degree of cool reason. It helped that Nixon’s White House staff included several people adept at appealing to the more temperate side of the President’s nature. When the U.S. Senate voted down G. Harrold Carswell, Nixon’s second failed nomination to the U.S. Supreme Court, the President’s ‘immediate reaction’ was to submit the name of a former Ku Klux Klan member, Senator Robert Byrd of West Virginia. Just two days later, though, Nixon settled on Harry Blackmun, a moderate jurist from Minnesota.⁵⁸

Encouraged by Bryce Harlow, the President was initially tempted to sanction a speech that Buchanan intended to ‘tear the scab off the issue of race in this country.’ By contrast, a number of senior Administration figures were appalled with Buchanan’s demagogic approach, and appealed to Nixon’s sense that ‘Atlanta

⁵⁷ John Brown to John Ehrlichman (March 3, 1970), ‘(CF) HU 2-1 (Education - Schooling) 3/1/70 - 10/21/70 (1969-70)’, Confidential Files, NARA; Patrick J. Buchanan to Richard Nixon (February 12, 1970), ‘314 Committee on Educational Quality (1 of 2)’, Box 30, Ehrlichman Files; H.R. Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries* (G.P. Putnam Son’s, 1994), pp. 127-8.

⁵⁸ John R Brown to John Ehrlichman (March 3, 1970), ‘314 Committee on Educational Quality (1 of 2)’, Box 30, Ehrlichman Files; John Brown to John Ehrlichman (February 5, 1970), ‘(CF) HU 2-1 (Education - Schooling) 1/20/69 - 2/28/70 (1969-70)’, White House Confidential Files, NARA; H.R. Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, pp. 147-9.

[was] the wrong place' to give such a speech. White House advisor Daniel Moynihan, no idealistic liberal on race himself, wrote an unusually stern memo to the Oval Office to denounce Buchanan as 'tampering with the integrity of the Presidency.' Around the same time Garment's chief aide, Bradley Patterson, composed a memo to his immediate boss lamenting the 'bassackwardness' of 'domestic decision-making under pressure.' The memo provided a startling insight into the process involved in drafting the Atlanta speech. None of the expert material in the White House's hands, such as reports by the Civil Rights Commission, were used at all, and Buchanan relied on newspaper accounts of recent appellate court decisions rather than tracking down the full texts. Incredibly, senior officials including Attorney General Mitchell and Secretary Finch were excluded from a process that could have potentially launched the Administration on a 'collision course with the courts.'⁵⁹

More than anyone, Leonard Garment was responsible for changing the President's mind. Undoubtedly, Garment was ideologically disposed towards the civil rights movement. Tom Evans, a key figure in Nixon's 1968 presidential campaign, described Garment's role as the 'resident gadfly' of liberal thinking. One only has to read his moving 'eulogy' of Clarence Mitchell, the civil rights movement's chief legislative lobbyist at mid-century, to appreciate Garment's sensitivities on the matter. In February 1970, such personal sympathies were reinforced by Patterson's frightening account of the weak research underpinning Buchanan's memo, as well as the fact that Garment had heard first-hand Buchanan's 'scab' comment at around three o'clock in the morning during a long battle between the two over the Atlanta speech draft. As Garment later recalled, this 'announcement helped keep me awake as we shouted our way through the night.' Terrified that Nixon would permit Agnew to give such an appalling speech in the Deep South, Garment also composed an impassioned memo to the Oval Office imploring that the President not 'throw down the gauntlet to the courts.' In any event, Garment concluded, the school desegregation issue 'should be explored with the nation, by the President, via television, not in Atlanta by the Vice President in a speech assembled under great time

⁵⁹ Leonard Garment, *Crazy Rhythm* (Random House, 1997), p. 207; Daniel Moynihan to Staff Secretary (March 5, 1970), 'HU 2-1 Education - Schooling (1/3/70 - 3/30/70)', Box 9, Human Affairs Files, NARA; H.R. Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, p. 128; Bradley Patterson to Leonard Garment, 'Domestic decision-making under pressure' (c. late February 1970), 'Desegregation - General Memoranda (2 of 2) (CFOA 5019)', Box 79, Garment Files.

pressure.’⁶⁰

The President’s voracious reading habits and intellectual curiosity aided Garment’s cause. On February 20, 1970, H.R. Haldeman recorded in his diary that Nixon was ‘*very* impressed’ with a piece by William Raspberry, a black educator, in the *Washington Post* that offered a hard-headed assessment of the complexity involved in school desegregation. Allied to Garment’s communiqués on the matter, the President developed a belated understanding that such a vital domestic issue should be treated with more care and attention than a rabble-rousing address by a divisive Vice President.

In a quite amazing transformation, Nixon now told his speech-writing team that they had a responsibility to ‘mobilize the *decent* opinion, but not throw down the gauntlet to Court.’ The day before, Nixon had confided to H.R. Haldeman his plan to engineer an electoral campaign by a ‘right-wing demagogue in some tough race’ as a means of precipitating an ‘enormous reaction’ against civil rights advocates. Having digested Raspberry’s column, President Nixon now changed his mind: telling speechwriters that ‘there’s only mileage in this for demagogues. Fine for a man who wants to be Governor but not for a man who *has* to be President.’ This was an important distinction. No longer did Nixon imagine himself associating with such rabble-rousers; no longer would he describe himself as ‘for Old John.’ Instead, he tried to approach the question with detachment. It also helped that the President was concerned that Spiro Agnew could become ‘oversold as the Southern strategy man’ and that such a speech would ‘dilute or waste the great asset he has become.’⁶¹

Whatever Nixon’s motivation, Leonard Garment’s ‘filibuster’ succeeded. Buchanan and Agnew were removed from the core decision-making process, and Garment installed with ‘the very vast assignment...[of]

⁶⁰ John Osborne Meeting Notes, ‘Nixon staff: Tom Evans - Boston - breakfast, Somerset Hotel (Oct-Nov, 1968)’, ‘Journalism File, White House File, Nixon, Notes, 1968-78, n.d.’, Box 22, Osborne Papers; Leonard Garment to Richard Nixon (February 19, 1970), ‘Desegregation - General Memoranda (2 of 2) (CFOA 5019)’, Box 79, Garment Files; Leonard Garment, *Crazy Rhythm*, pp. 204-7.

⁶¹ H.R. Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, pp. 128-30; John Brown to John Ehrlichman (March 3, 1970) Untitled Document beginning ‘3-2-70 11.45a TT-Raspberry-E’ (March 2, 1970), ‘JDE Notes of Meetings with the President / 1/1/70 - 6/30/70 (2 of 5)’, Box 3, Ehrlichman Files.

preparing a new approach to the civil rights problem' over the course of three weeks. Committed to a wholesale re-examination of the school desegregation question, the President also began to consult beyond the White House for ideas. On March 2, 1970, Nixon met with Raspberry in the Oval Office to discuss a range of educational issues that included free school lunches for impoverished pupils, the general 'direction' of integration, and the fundamental question of how to 'teach poor black, disadvantaged' children more effectively. The President also met for half-an-hour with Professor James Coleman, the highly distinguished educator who advocated federal funding of poor, disadvantaged southern school districts. Meanwhile, Leonard Garment digested a whole host of personal interviews, housing maps, school locator maps and even 'aerial photographs whose Byzantine quality made my eyes blur and my head ache' before submitting a book of two-hundred-plus pages to the President. Over the course of three weeks, Nixon studied Garment's materials and consulted with his 'inner circle of tough political realists' that included Mitchell, Haldeman, Harlow and Dent.⁶²

Having decided to personally issue a statement on school desegregation, Richard Nixon immersed himself in this compelling dilemma. On the issue of racial equality, such involvement was unusual. Historian Dean Kotlowksi has concluded that President Nixon's 'belief in civil rights proved shallow, intellectual, and abstract rather than intense, emotional, and engaged.' In both Nixon's presidential campaign and first year in office, Kotlowksi's assessment rang true. A good example was the Administration's proposal to prohibit literacy tests across all fifty states. The original Voting Rights Act had only proscribed their application in southern states where they had been historically deployed to systematically exclude African-Americans, and poor whites, from the ballot. Testifying before Congress, Attorney General Mitchell described the Administration's proposal as providing 'adequate, common sense safeguards against discriminatory or arbitrary denial of the right to vote, without singling out any particular State or county for condemnation.' The proposal conformed to Kotlowksi's biting assessment. 'Shallow' because it deliberately appealed to white southern complaints about regional discrimination when Mitchell himself admitted the success of the

⁶² Tod R. Hullin to John Brown, 'P-212-Approach to civil rights problem' (February 24, 1970), '(CF) HU 2-1 (Education - Schooling) 1/20/69 - 2/28/70 (1969-70)', White House Confidential Files, NARA; William Safire, *Before The Fall*, p. 235; Leonard Garment, *Crazy Rhythm*, pp. 205-11.

1965 Act; 'abstract' because the proposal ignored historic concentration of literacy test discrimination down South; 'intellectual' since it ignored the finite nature of enforcement resources that could not be effectively spread across fifty states equally.⁶³

The message issued by President Nixon on March 25, 1970, was conceived and executed in markedly different terms. Whereas the July 3, 1969, statement had been formulated with a specific end result in mind, namely the reformation of Title VI guidelines, this time Nixon immersed himself fully into the process of tackling such a complex political – and moral – question. Bryce Harlow later told a senior White House staffer that, 'on no other document in the years I was there did the President deliberate more than on this one. When it was finished, it said just exactly what he wanted to say.' Rejecting the idea of a Rooseveltian 'fireside message' or a divisive constitutional amendment, the President instead chose to release an 8,000-word statement that, he told reporters, would represent 'a comprehensive study and discussion of all of the relevant legal decisions in this field...[the] most comprehensive analysis of the legal situation and also the problems of segregation and education since the *Brown* decision.'

The emphasis on judicial decrees was deliberate: Nixon intended to use the statement to 'try to influence the Courts in some of their future rulings.' Whilst affirming the Supreme Court's rulings on school desegregation, Nixon's aides insisted to Leonard Garment that appellate decrees mandating cross-town busing be denounced in the statement as 'unreasonable.' Rather than throwing the gauntlet down in front of the Supreme Court bench, Nixon hoped to lead the Justices towards a more conservative position through the power of reasoned argument. The gambit was characteristic of Nixon. He would use the 'iron butt' honed at law school to thoroughly educate himself about school desegregation, and hope to enrapture common folk

⁶³ Dean Kotlowski, *Nixon's Civil Rights*, p. 11; Bradley Patterson to John Ehrlichman, (December 8, 1969), 'HU 2-4 Voting / Begin - 12/31/69', Box 19, Human Affairs Files, NARA; For evidence of the chronic shortfall in Justice Department manpower to enforce civil rights statutes, see Richard Harris, *Justice: The Crisis of Law, Order, and Freedom in America* (The Bodley Head, 1970), pp. 165-8.

and elites alike with a thorough examination of the subject on paper.⁶⁴

At times, the President's involvement in the drafting process was quite remarkable. On closer inspection, this fetish for control reflected Nixon's impotence to effect dramatic policy alterations. Unable to implement his own preference that legal desegregation, rather than genuine integration, represented the 'wave of the future,' Nixon demanded that the statement commit itself to 'carry[ing] out the law' but no more. He also reminded close White House advisors that, when it came to drafting such a message, 'semantics are NB.' If Nixon had to 'kick the South' around in policy terms, he was determined that the blows be cushioned with placatory language. On reading a draft composed by Ray Price, Nixon recoiled at Price's apparently excessive 'use of "moral wrong" and demanded that "moral" be excised in favour of just "wrong." Expanding on this command, the President observed that "southerners are [not] morally wrong – rather [the nation is] wrong therefore just say "wrong." Nixon was effectively working the thrust of the Stennis Amendment into the text. In this vein, he also insisted that 'one single act' could convey the White House's message more articulately than reams of conciliatory rhetoric. Accordingly, Nixon ordered that Leon Panetta finally be fired alongside Paul Rilling, Panetta's equally-liberal counterpart in HEW's Atlanta office. Rilling's replacement was to be nominated by Winston Blount, the only southerner in the Nixon Cabinet. Journalists scrutinising the text on its release observed the inconsistency between the statement's emphasis on 'good faith' efforts to desegregate by southern school boards and the Supreme Court's insistence that the process be effected 'at once.'⁶⁵

Nixon's concern with symbolism occasionally metamorphosed into perverse obfuscation. Professor James

⁶⁴ William Safire, *Before the Fall*, p. 241; 'The President's News Conference of March 21, 1970', *The Public Papers of President Richard M. Nixon* (United States Government Printing Office, 1970), p. 290; Bud Krogh to Leonard Garment (March 10, 1970), 'Desegregation - Draft of Emergency Education Act of 1970 (5 of 5) (CFOA 8806)', Box 73, Garment Files.

⁶⁵ Untitled document beginning, '3-19-70 - TT -H - E (915 A)' (March 19, 1970) & '3-10-70-TT -H-E-Zig 10A' (March 10, 1970): both in 'JDE Notes of Meetings with the President / 1/1/70 - 6/30/70 (3 of 5)', Box 3, Ehrlichman Files; Untitled Document beginning, '2.27.70 TT - E....1) Rome AFB installation (February 27, 1970)' & Untitled Document beginning '3-10-70 - TT PMG Blount...1) Thurs press conf. PMG' (March 10, 1970): both in 'JDE Notes of Meetings with the President / 1/1/70 - 6/30/70 (2 of 5)', Box 3, Ehrlichman Files; 'Background Briefing: Elementary and Secondary School Desegregation' (March 24, 1970), 'Civil Rights, Office of, President's Message on Elementary and secondary school desegregation', Subject File: Cabinet Committee on Education, Box 139, Richardson Papers.

Coleman had advised Nixon that a crucial problem pertaining to southern desegregation was the lack of a ‘carrot’ in the form of financial aid. Having received similar advice from informed Administration officials, Nixon’s statement accordingly proposed a legislative bill that provided \$1.5 billion to school districts converting to racially-unified school systems. The President was keen that such financial aid be used for ‘educ[ation] not integ[ration]: to provide ‘better sch[ools]’ rather than the ‘tires, busses’ he believed were demanded by liberal interest groups. With southern sensitivities in mind, Nixon also demanded that the bill not be presented as simply targeted at any one region in particular.

As a result, his March 24 statement explicitly stated that such funds would focus on ‘racially impacted areas, North and South.’ Despite such promises of equal treatment, the legislation sent from the White House to Congress included a provision for ‘double-counting’ of funds where the need was the greatest. In practice, this meant southern schools in the fall of 1970. Whatever Nixon’s fears about appearing to proffer a disproportionately large carrot below the Mason-Dixon line, southern school boards would snap up this funding without a second thought. In early August 1970, HEW Secretary Elliot Richardson reported that ‘all Dist[ri]ct[s]’ in South Carolina were interested in this money. Despite their imaginative efforts, southern Democrats like Senator John McClellan were unable to make a sectional issue out of this type of funding.⁶⁶

An Unconvincing Commitment Firmly Made

Intimately recorded in meeting notes taken down by John Ehrlichman, Nixon’s decision-making during this process is most frustrating to the contemporary eye. Undoubtedly, the President had an enviable capacity to

⁶⁶ Untitled Document beginning ‘3-19-70 - TT -H - E (915 A)’ (March 19, 1970) & Untitled Document beginning ‘3-18-70 TT - H - E - 8.40A’ (March 18, 1970): both in ‘JDE Notes of Meetings with the President / 1/1/70 - 6/30/70 (3 of 5)’, Box 3, Ehrlichman Files; ‘Statement About Desegregation of Elementary and Secondary Schools’ (March 24, 1970), *The Public Papers of President Richard M. Nixon* (United States Government Printing Office, 1970), p. 317; J.W. McLane to Leonard Garment, ‘Background Papers on "Emergency Educational Opportunity Assistance Act of 1970"' (May 1, 1970), ‘Desegregation - Draft of Emergency Education Act of 1970 (4 of 5) (CFOA 8806)’, Box 73, Garment Files; Untitled Meeting Notes Beginning ‘8.4.70 (4.45P) / TT - VP - AG ‘ (August 4, 1970), ‘JDE Notes of Meetings with the President / 7/1/70 - 12/31/70 (1 of 8)’, Box 4, Ehrlichman Files. For an example of Senator John McClellan’s rhetoric on the matter, see Testimony by Elliot Richardson & Stanley Pottinger (August 6, 1970), Hearings, Select Committee on Equal Educational Opportunities, U.S. Senate, 91st Cong., 2d Session (1970).

digest and assimilate a wide range of perspectives when studying a particular area of policy. Thus he could simultaneously deploy arguments made by Yale Law Professor Alexander Bickel and education commentator William Raspberry alongside more cynical political considerations. This impression is confirmed by Roy Wilkins, executive secretary of the NAACP, who was struck by Nixon's grasp of civil rights issues, if not his moral economy, when the two met in person. The frustration is that the President evinced considerable paranoia and conservatism when predicting the political outcomes of any particular policy decision. For example, Nixon accepted that the Administration could extend no more time to recalcitrant school boards in Arkansas, Mississippi and South Carolina beyond the spring of 1970. He also privately understood that the March 24 statement could not 'knock out' George Wallace's ambitions for the presidential campaign of 1972. Nevertheless, the President still insisted that the Justice Department refrain from filing suit in these three states until after May 5, 1970: the date of the Democratic gubernatorial primary in Alabama that Wallace had to win to challenge Nixon two years later. Such prevarication was buttressed by a \$100,000 donation to Wallace's primary opponent, incumbent Governor Albert Brewer.⁶⁷

This unnecessary delay was further extended by Wallace's involvement in a run-off election against Brewer. As a result, some contentious school desegregation cases in South Carolina only ended in mid-August 1970, just weeks before those districts were due to open for the new academic year. Whatever the politics involved for both President and school district alike, this situation crippled the latter's ability to plan effectively for the forthcoming year. As one administrator from a black-belt school system confided to a reporter from the Race Relations Center during the early summer of 1970, 'whatever [the federal government] do, we hope they will go ahead and do it and not wait and come up in August and tell us we must get it done in September.' Given the lengthy delay between the Justice Department filing a suit in federal court and the presiding judge finally handing down a decree, Nixon's prevarication in these cases ensured that a number of school districts did

⁶⁷ Untitled Document beginning '3.10.70 TT - AG Mitchell - E (March 10, 1970) & Untitled Document beginning '3-11-70 TT - Finch -E - 11.30 PM' (March 11, 1970): both in 'JDE Notes of Meetings with the President / 1/1/70 - 6/30/70 (2 of 5)', Box 3, Ehrlichman Files, NARA; Untitled Document beginning '015...1) Santa Barbara oil 2) Nerve Gas Movem't now, not later' (c. late April / early May, 1970), 'JDE Notes of Meetings with the President / 1/1/70 - 6/30/70 (4 of 5)', Box 3, Ehrlichman Files, NARA; Dan Carter, *The Politics of Rage* (Louisiana State University Press), p. 388. For evidence of Wilkins' thoughts on Nixon, see Leonard Garment, 'President's Meeting with Roy Wilkins' (May 13, 1970), 'May 10, 1970', Box 80, President's Office Files, NARA.

experience such serious inconvenience.⁶⁸

Unaware of such machinations, civil rights supporters still received the March 24 statement with profound suspicion. Certainly, its 'dry, legalistic' tone did little to alter their impression that President Nixon continued to placate white southern interests at the expense of racial justice; an impression only reinforced by the Administration's recent response to the Stennis Amendment. Advocates for racial equality were in no mood to grant the President the benefit of the doubt. The spring of 1970 represented yet another low point in relations between civil rights groups and the White House. When the NAACP's Legal Defense Fund held a symposium on desegregating southern school systems in mid-March 1970, the organisation's director of legal information and community services declared that 'it is clear we cannot depend on the Nixon Administration to achieve meaningful school desegregation in the South.'⁶⁹

Advocates of racial equality within the federal government demonstrated a similar lack of confidence in Nixon's commitment to civil rights reform. On March 3, 1970, 124 officials from HEW's Office for Civil Rights addressed a critical letter to the President himself to note their 'profound dismay' at the events that precipitated Leon Panetta's dismissal, and observe that 'the recent flow of White House statements, as well as a certain untimely and critical reserve, have served to becloud the school desegregation issue and thus to lend credence to the supposition that the National Government has grown insensitive to the cause of enforcing equal rights.' Around 1,800 HEW employees also signed a memorandum directed at Secretary Finch demanding an explanation of how the department would proceed in the wake of Panetta's departure.⁷⁰

Two days after receiving this angry memo, Nixon invited thirty seven of his Administration's top black

⁶⁸ Race Relations Information Center, *Majority Black School Districts*, p. 37. For an example of a South Carolina school district involved in litigation just weeks before the new school year in the fall of 1970, see Strom Thurmond to Ken Cole (August 28, 1970), 'HU 2-1 / ST 40 Education Schooling / South Carolina / Beginning - 12/31/1970', Box 15, Human Affairs File, NARA.

⁶⁹ 'Civil Rights: Desegregation Yes, Integration No, *Time* (April 6, 1970); 'New school strategy', *Race Relations Reporter* No. 5 (April 1, 1970), in 'School Desegregation - Jan Feb 70', Box 11, 'School Deseg 1954-1970', *Newsweek* Atlanta Bureau Records.

⁷⁰ Signed letter from HEW employees to Richard Nixon (March 3, 1970), Folder 1, Box 2, Nixon-HEW Files, NARA; Charles Peters & Taylor Branch, *Blowing the Whistle: Dissent in the Public Interest* (Praeger, 1972), p. 168.

officials to discuss racial issues. James Farmer, soon to quit his post as Assistant Secretary at HEW in exasperation with White House policies, voiced the feelings of those attending. Advising the President that the feeling of 'despair' amongst black citizens was at a ten-year low, Farmer observed that black officials felt profoundly uncomfortable at serving under Nixon due to 'the prevailing feeling among Negroes that the Administration is embarked on a Southern Strategy designed to slow down school desegregation to the detriment of Negro children.'⁷¹

Nixon's March 24 statement did not reverse this appraisal. In a vitriolic attack, *Newsday* accused the President of stripping away 'this country's commitment to racial equality and social justice,' and controversially concluded that, 'the message represents an explicit turn-back toward Jim Crow and separate-but-equal.' Whilst few news organisations went as far as *Newsday*, many were seriously underwhelmed by the statement's tone. *Time* Magazine accused the President of 'lacking urgency or compassion' for minority citizens, and went so far as to observe that, 'President Nixon has proclaimed the Compromise of 1970 in order to soothe the South and placate resentful whites elsewhere.' Nixon was so irate with this assessment that he ordered Jeb Magruder, a White House aide who later achieved public notoriety for this type of 'ratfucking' episode, to concoct letters to *Time* complaining about the unfairness of its verdict on the President's message. In a similar vein, after reading a news story about government lawyers publicly criticising ambiguities in the March 24 statement, Nixon ordered Haldeman and Ehrlichman to 'get their names [and] have their resignations on my desk by Monday.'⁷²

Whilst concerned with his reputation in the national media, Nixon also feared that the white South would receive his message as yet another federal intrusion into local race relations. An internal White House examination of reaction in seventy-five newspaper columns found the majority of analysts concluding that 'neither the segregationists nor those calling for total integration would be satisfied.' Rather bizarrely, such

⁷¹ Vernon C. Coffey to Bryce Harlow & John Ehrlichman (March 7, 1970), '314 Committee on Educational Quality (1 of 2)', Box 30, Ehrlichman Files.

⁷² 'Civil Rights: Desegregation Yes', *Time*; Staff Secretary to Jeb Magruder (April 3, 1970), '(CF) HU 2-1 (Education - Schooling) 3/1/70 - 10/21/70 (1969-70)', Confidential Files 1969-1974, NARA; Untitled document beginning '(3) CARSWELL - Scott and Griffin "categorically denied" they informed', 'News Summaries - March 1970', Box 31, President's Office Files, NARA.

unhappy compromise represented the best possible outcome for a President caught between two mutually antagonistic positions. Harry Dent further allayed the President's fears by reporting that the message had received a good press with 'favourable headlines' down South. Dent added that it had provided white southern Republicans like Strom Thurmond and Albert Watson with enough material to point to the Administration's sensitivity on racial issues. Clarke Reed, bellwether of grassroots Republican opinion in the South, wrote to Dent to optimistically declare that the March 24 message offered a 'fair appraisal of the issue as it exists today under the law and was morally correct and creditably honest.' Reed was particularly taken with Nixon's insistence that the 'federal bureaucracy respond to this policy statement,' since southern Republicans had witnessed with dismay the perpetuation of Johnson-era personnel and departmental culture under the new President.⁷³

Once again, Reed's initial optimism quickly turned to dust. As with the July 3 statement six months earlier, the President committed himself to enforcing judicial rulings that went far beyond the conciliatory rhetoric offered up to conservative constituencies. When a prominent newspaper subsequently reported that the Nixon Administration planned a sustained assault on faculty segregation in southern schools, Robert Mardian complained that the headline should have read, 'The Supreme Court (vice, Nixon) orders Teacher Integration.' Responding to criticism from White House conservatives that HEW had pushed the envelope too far in this case, Mardian defensively retorted that, 'this architect simply followed the specifications of the owner!'⁷⁴

The Nixon Administration could carve few policy concessions to conservatives out of its commitment to enforcing judicial mandates. The March 24 statement's principal innovation was to appease the region's metropolitan school districts, whose desegregation it held to have been precipitated by residential patterns rather than local or state legal prohibitions. Nixon decreed that, in the absence of explicit Supreme Court

⁷³ 'Editorial and column reaction to the President's message on school desegregation' (April 3, 1970), 'Civil Rights, Office of, President's Message on Elementary and secondary school desegregation', Box 139, Richardson Papers; Harry Dent to Richard Nixon (March 25, 1970) & Clarke Reed to Harry Dent (March 25, 1970): both in 'School Compliance (January - November, 1970)', Box 6, Dent Papers.

⁷⁴ Robert Mardian to Bryce Harlow (April 7, 1970), 'HU 2-1 Education - Schooling (4/1/70 - 4/30/70)', Box 9, Human Affairs Files, NARA.

rulings in this area, this type of segregation should not be remedied by school desegregation plans. The decree was largely executed by federal bureaucrats: during the school year of 1970-1971, the South Carolina city schools of Columbia and Charleston both remained chronically segregated by race. The problem for Nixon's southern strategy, and Clarke Reed's temper, was that such stated exceptions remained statistically exceptional in the Deep South. The majority of these states' school systems underwent massive desegregation in the summer of 1970.⁷⁵

Enforcement Action Deals Heavy Blow to South Carolina Republicanism

Federal officials quickly disabused local school officials of any expectations that the March 24 statement had ushered in a new era of 'all deliberate speed.' At a HEW press conference a fortnight later, Stanley Pottinger, Panetta's replacement at OCR, firmly insisted that his civil rights team considered the statement 'as a clear mandate to bring into compliance' all school systems not under court supervision or given clearance for an acceptable desegregation plan the following year. The Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division conceived of their responsibilities in similar terms. On April 17, Jerris Leonard composed a letter to southern state education boards to reiterate the March 24 statement's insistence that 'the Constitutional mandate [to fully integrate southern schools] will be enforced.' In the absence of 'full compliance,' Leonard observed, the division would entertain few qualms about pressing for a court order placing entire state systems of education under judicial supervision.⁷⁶

After visiting South Carolina in the spring of 1970, Vice President Spiro Agnew observed in a memo to Nixon that local school superintendents continued to complain that 'there has been no change at HEW. They say they are having difficulty getting proper cooperation at HEW because of the attitude of the people working under Panetta's successor, Stan Pottinger.' Such concern with the enforcement of federal school

⁷⁵ Details of 22 South Carolina School Districts and Proposed Action in Wake of *Swann* Decision (c. May 1971), 'South Carolina, Clippings (1970-1971)', Cabinet Committee on Education Files.

⁷⁶ William L. Horton to John Ehrlichman (April 10, 1970), Folder 1, Nixon-HEW Files, NARA; Jerris Leonard to State Board of Education of South Carolina (c. April 1970), 'South Carolina Politics (January - December, 1970)', Box 6, Dent Papers.

desegregation mandates created problems for an important subsection of Richard Nixon's southern strategy: his plan to construct a substantial base of Republican allies in U.S. Senate seats and governors' mansions across the South. In the words of Senator Thurmond, actions like the proposed state-wide court order presented a serious threat to 'successful campaigns for the governorship in 1970 and for the Presidency in 1972...in South Carolina.' If Nixon had hoped that massive school desegregation could be carried out without harm to his political interests down South, then he was sorely mistaken.⁷⁷

Jerris Leonard, in particular, would prove a perpetual thorn in the side of southern Republicans keen to advance the party's cause. Leonard's loyal performance during the Mississippi episode the previous summer would prove exceptional. Strom Thurmond had long considered the assistant attorney general 'not capable of objectivity in the area of civil rights,' and by the spring of 1970 demanded his removal from such a politically sensitive position. Thurmond's anger was understandable. Leonard proved 'inept' at balancing the competing imperatives of clarity on the school issue with the shades of obfuscation necessary to protect southern Republicans from political reprisals. Of particular concern to Thurmond and his party allies down South was an intensely embarrassing incident that occurred in Columbia a month after the March 24 statement. Ignoring the Senator's pleas, Leonard had travelled to the South Carolina capital with Robert Mardian and Stanley Pottinger to clarify the Administration's new approach in a meeting with the state's educational establishment.⁷⁸

Held on April 28, 1970, the meeting did not begin well after Leonard introduced the incoming OCR director as 'the new Leon Panetta.' Panetta's name was not particularly favoured in South Carolina, and indeed held in similar esteem to that of his former boss, Secretary Finch. It did not help that the press had recently reported one assistant secretary at HEW as predicting that Pottinger would end up 'out-Panetta-ing' his predecessor at OCR. Matters worsened when Leonard bluntly pronounced the freedom-of-choice concept 'dead.' Questioned about the compatibility of such rhetoric with Nixon's presidential campaign promises two

⁷⁷ Spiro Agnew to Richard Nixon (c. 1970) & Strom Thurmond to Richard Nixon (April 30, 1970): both in 'South Carolina Politics (January - December, 1970)', Box 6, Dent Papers.

⁷⁸ Strom Thurmond to Richard Nixon (c.1970).

years earlier, an exasperated Leonard retorted, ‘that was a political statement. Now what’s your question? I’m not here dealing with politics.’ Even the ultraconservative Robert Mardian reminded the assembled officials of Nixon’s promise to eliminate school segregation ‘root and branch’ in his March 24 statement, and bluntly concluded, ‘it’s going to be done.’ For Cyril Busbee, such honesty represented a blessed relief. Speaking to reporters after the meeting, the state superintendent for education optimistically reported that the federal team ‘cleared the air tremendously. The districts understand the direction in which they’re pointed, but they may not like it.’ The Democratic establishment did not seek to reap political capital from the statement. Governor McNair simply observed that ‘there is no room for further confusion’ about whether school districts would fully desegregate by the fall of 1970.⁷⁹

For South Carolina Republicans more concerned with gaining power than using it responsibly, the meeting proved a disaster. Whilst state party officials publicly claimed that Leonard’s ‘political statement’ remark referred to the specific question posed that day, it was perfectly clear to the educators and media present that the assistant attorney general was actually alluding to Richard Nixon’s promises in 1968. Strom Thurmond was furious. Having explained the serious damage caused to Nixon’s reputation in South Carolina by the trip, Thurmond turned his thoughts to the Republican field running in the state that fall: concluding that ‘the repercussions of this visit and to these statements have been severe and will be difficult to overcome between now and election day.’ James Edwards, a senior state Republican who would later become the party’s first GOP governor since Reconstruction, was so angered by Leonard’s remarks that he threatened to resign his position on the state executive committee. The threat held potentially serious implications for President Nixon’s reputation in South Carolina, since Edwards had proven influential in holding the line for Nixon against the Reagan charge at the GOP Convention two years earlier. His departure could have proven a rallying point for the many state Republicans dissatisfied with the Nixon Administration’s performance on schools and patronage.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Strom Thurmond to Richard Nixon (c.1970); Ivan G. Goldman, ‘James Farmer Sure of Nixon Path’, *Kansas City Times* (March 23, 1970), in Harry Dent to Bryce Harlow (April 28, 1970), Folder 1, Box 2, Nixon-HEW Files, NARA; Jack Bass, ‘Federal Officials Were Blunt About Schools’, *Charlotte Observer* (May 3, 1970).

⁸⁰ Strom Thurmond to Richard Nixon (c.1970).

James Edwards did not depart, no doubt aware that by infuriating Senator Thurmond he would be effectively ending his own personal ambitions within the state GOP. Edwards' impotent rhetoric typified South Carolina Republicans' response to the school desegregation question that year. Whilst frustrated and angry that Nixon's presidential campaign promises would have to be broken to implement judicial mandates, senior figures within the state party privately accepted that the Nixon Administration had little alternative. Ray Harris, state GOP chairman, wrote to John Mitchell to tactfully observe that, 'I do not question Jerris' dedication and motivation in this instance. As a matter of fact from all reports, what he had to say is true and factual. It was the way it was said and the visit itself which brought on the disastrous results in the mind of the public.'⁸¹

Even Senator Thurmond admitted that Leonard should only have phrased his comments differently, not altered their substance. 'A more diplomatic and palatable statement' was all the Senator had desired. He could accept that Nixon's policies had altered in the light of recent court rulings, but needed to protect himself and fellow Republican candidates from a vengeful electorate. Jack Bass concluded in his insightful *Charlotte Observer* column about the meeting that, 'As a political football, the freedom-of-choice concept has been carried on offense by the Republicans in South Carolina. Last week they were forced to punt.' Thurmond and his GOP allies could only hope that, come the midterm elections, this political football would not be returned with interest.⁸²

Incredibly, Strom Thurmond even advised South Carolina school districts to produce legally acceptable school desegregation plans. Despite such a remarkable concession, HEW officials evinced no obvious awareness that the South Carolina Senator's efforts should be treated with any particular care or respect. In fact, the whole process severely tested the patience of Thurmond and his staff. For a start, it was cumbersome, slow, and poorly coordinated: Justice and HEW officials even made different decisions on the acceptability of the same desegregation plan. Despite such provocations, Thurmond continued to privately

⁸¹ Ray Harris to John Mitchell (May 4, 1970), 'HU 2-1 / ST 40 Education Schooling / South Carolina / Beginning - 12/31/1970', Box 15, Human Affairs Files, NARA.

⁸² Strom Thurmond to Richard Nixon (c.1970); Jack Bass, 'Federal Officials Were Blunt'.

advocate that South Carolina school districts comply with federal mandates. On May 12, 1970, Senator Thurmond sent an urgent telegram to President Nixon to demand 'solution to the school problem.' Quite incredibly, Thurmond openly admitted that he had 'strongly encouraged all school districts in South Carolina cited for non-compliance to submit plans.'

The problem was that these plans were now 'lingering in the Office for Civil Rights, HEW, for weeks.' As a result, eleven South Carolina school districts whose desegregation plans could have been 'immediately approved if something down to prompt HEW to act' remained in administrative limbo. Thurmond's influence over the Nixon Administration did not even extend to administrative efficacy in this instance. Instructively, Thurmond prefaced these remarks by pointedly observing that 'I do not ask for special treatment or that requirements of law be disregarded, but that plans submitted by school districts which meet constitutional requirements be immediately approved.' Thurmond's expectations had metamorphosed from the fulfilment of substantive policy demands to the request that federal officials process desegregation plans in a timely fashion. His proclamations eighteen months earlier about a 'better deal' for southern school officials under the Nixon Administration had proven completely misguided.⁸³

In reality, the practical effects of formulating plans that conformed to contemporary judicial standards were intimidating. Whilst Stanley Pottinger promised the Senator on several occasions that OCR required only that 'each district meet minimum Constitutional requirements', these requirements actually proved severe when compared with that which the federal government had previously required of South Carolina school systems. For example, OCR officials spent more than a fortnight haggling over the proposed racial composition of five percent of the future population of a single school in Edgefield County. In a similar vein, federal negotiators also insisted that a new 'Special Programs and Rehabilitative School' proposed in Pickens County be subject to racial quotas, lest it fulfil local black citizens' fear of becoming a 'dumping ground' for

⁸³ Strom Thurmond to Richard Nixon (May 12, 1970), 'School Compliance' (January - November, 1970)', Box 6, Dent Papers.

local African-American children.⁸⁴

Whilst such requirements conformed to judicial standards, on occasion South Carolina school district officials strongly suspected that OCR bureaucrats had chosen to simply ignore Nixon's March 24 statement. As a result, Thurmond complained to Robert Mardian that 'various members of HEW's Office of Civil Rights' were neither negotiating 'in good faith' nor ratifying perfectly-constitutional plans. When federal negotiators insisted that Laurens County's desegregation plan include 'racial percentage quotas' for each school in the district, local officials complained that such a requirement 'appeared in direct contradiction to the recent statements made by President Nixon.' In response, a senior HEW official from Atlanta was quoted as bluntly stating that, 'the president's statement has little effect upon us and we intend to operate just like we've been operating.'⁸⁵

Justified or not, reports of such incidents infuriated Thurmond's staff. Billy Wilkins, an aide from the Senator's office, proposed that 'it would be politically feasible to urge the school districts not yet in compliance to refuse to negotiate further with HEW, rather than encouraging them to comply and assisting in drawing their plans, as you have been doing.' Thurmond agreed with Wilkins' analysis, and warned White House aides that he intended 'to attack the Administration on the Senate floor' and 'encourage the people of South Carolina to refrain from all negotiations with HEW' if improvements were unforthcoming. On learning of these threats, Bryce Harlow wrote to Robert Mardian to despairingly demand, '??? What now???' Harlow need not have worried: Thurmond was so concerned about the threat of a state-wide desegregation suit to his political standing in South Carolina that he continued to advise districts in his home state to arrive at terms with federal negotiators.⁸⁶ The Senator would eventually denounce the Nixon Administration on the Senate floor, but only after it had publicly embarrassed Thurmond by adopting remarkably liberal

⁸⁴ Strom Thurmond to Robert Mardian (April 27, 1970), Billy Wilkins to Strom Thurmond, 'School Desegregation in South Carolina' (c.1970) & Billy Wilkins to Strom Thurmond, 'Pickens County School District "A"' (April 27, 1970), all in: Harry Dent to Bryce Harlow (April 28, 1970), Folder 1, Box 2, Nixon-HEW Files, NARA.

⁸⁵ Strom Thurmond to Robert Mardian (April 27, 1970); K.C. Hanna Sr. to Robert Mardian (April 22, 1970): in Harry Dent to Bryce Harlow (April 28, 1970), Folder 1, Box 2, Nixon-HEW Files, NARA; Billy Wilkins to Strom Thurmond, 'School Desegregation in South Carolina'.

⁸⁶ At the time, Georgia was subject to a state-wide school desegregation lawsuit.

standpoints on several issues pertaining to southern school desegregation that even the Johnson Administration had ducked.⁸⁷

Over the course of eighteen months, southern Republicans began to accept that the candidate they had supported on a 'freedom-of-choice' ticket would preside over the greatest period of school desegregation in the nation's history. Confronted with a White House that refused to defy federal court orders, this band of dogmatic conservatives proved mere passengers in the final skirmishes of the battle over integration. Even Senator Thurmond's characteristically 'neo-Calhounite' stance on federal intervention in southern racial affairs softened when confronted with the Administration's commitment to enforcing judicial mandates. No longer could Thurmond wave the bloody shirt and defiantly declare that 'all the laws of Washington, and all the bayonets of the Army, cannot force the Negro into our homes, our schools, our churches and our places of recreation.'⁸⁸

Twenty-two years after that speech, made during Thurmond's presidential campaign on the States' Rights ticket in 1948, the Senator's legislative office contacted all thirty-nine school districts in South Carolina that remained uncommitted to genuine desegregation the following fall. Instead of pressing them to resist federal mandates, Thurmond's staff advised them to achieve compliance; albeit at the lowest level of desegregation available. The laws of Washington and the threat of federal force might have loomed over these school districts, but it was Strom Thurmond responsible for arranging the meetings that would result in African-Americans attending formerly-white schools the following fall. In total, Thurmond pressed eighteen South Carolina school districts into compliance, including his birthplace of Edgefield County.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Billy Wilkins to Strom Thurmond, 'School Desegregation in South Carolina'; Bryce Harlow to Robert Mardian (May 15, 1970), 'HU 2-1 / ST 40 Education Schooling / South Carolina / Beginning - 12/31/1970', Box 15, Human Affairs Files, NARA. The issues tackled by the Nixon Administration after being ignored by the Johnson Administration included tax exemption for lilywhite private academies and the prospect of sending substantial numbers of federal marshals to oversee desegregation in southern school districts.

⁸⁸ James G. Banks, 'Strom Thurmond and the Revolt Against Modernity', PhD Dissertation (Kent State University, 1970), pp. 6 & 120.

⁸⁹ Billy Wilkins to Strom Thurmond, 'School Desegregation in South Carolina'; Ken Clawson, 'Thurmond Quietly Acts To Spur S.C. Integration', *Washington Post* (July 31, 1970).

At the beginning of the 1970-71 school year, African-American students integrated Strom Thurmond High School in Aiken, South Carolina. Newspaper reports subsequently indicated that the process was carried out 'peacefully, even proudly,' after a biracial effort to make desegregation work. The Senator did not stand in the schoolhouse door that day, and neither did he address protesting parents like his protégé Albert Watson had to disastrous effect back in the spring. Instead, that week saw Strom Thurmond in Washington D.C. lobbying against the appointment of Robert Marland as the new U.S. Commissioner of Education. Meeting with HEW Secretary Elliott Richardson on August 19, 1970, Thurmond expressed concern that Marland was an advocate of 'forced busing.' Whilst Secretary Richardson privately admitted that the South Carolina Senator might enjoy a veto over Marland's appointment, it was equally clear that Strom Thurmond was utterly powerless to prevent black and white children learning and mingling together in a school bearing his own name.⁹⁰

By restating his longstanding opposition to 'forced busing', Thurmond's loud objections to Marland's nomination helped shore up his conservative credentials back home. Nevertheless, it could barely conceal that Strom Thurmond's defiance against school desegregation had run out of ditches. Where once he complained about the substance of integrating South Carolina's schools, now Thurmond lamented undue delays in what he recognised as an inevitable process. Unwilling to cast himself back into the political wilderness, the Senator had no other option. Less than two years after Thurmond had touted Richard Nixon and his commitment to 'freedom of choice' throughout the South, the region's schools became fully integrated for the first time. Richard Nixon's southern strategy did accord Senator Strom Thurmond a certain level of influence in the corridors of executive power, but it certainly did not take the revolutionary form that the belligerent South Carolinian had imagined in the spring of 1968.

⁹⁰ Kenneth Reich, 'Racial Trouble Is Brewing in Hometown of Thurmond' *Atlanta Journal* (11 November, 1970), 'School Deseg Situationer - 11/70 Source Material', Box 11', 'School Deseg 1954-70', *Newsweek* Atlanta Bureau Records; Telephone Conversations between Elliott Richardson & Fred Malek (August 19, 1970), Elliott Richardson & John Ehrlichman (August 19, 1970 & August 20, 1970): all in 'Telecons - August 1970', Box 127, Richardson Papers.

Chapter IV

The Southern Strategy Unravels:

Politics versus Principle during the Mass Desegregation of South Carolina Schools

On July 17, 1970, Strom Thurmond rose to address the United States Senate. The majority of his colleagues had vacated the chamber, anticipating another protracted denunciation of civil rights and overweening federal power. That particular day, however, Strom's troubles assumed a different complexion, namely the Nixon White House's apparent negation of its relationship with the white South. Ever since the President's March 24 statement on school desegregation, the Senator had acquiesced to a series of public and private humiliations as the federal government launched its final mass assault on racial segregation in Deep South schools. By August 1970, Senator Strom Thurmond publicly warned the President away from campaigning in the Palmetto State lest his Administration's civil rights policies undermine Republican candidates' chances of election. How did a President elected with the votes of white southerners become anathema to that same constituency in less than two years of office?

This chapter shows that, eventually, Nixon's instincts towards good governance proved stronger than his ambition to refashion a 'New Republican Majority' in the South. This is a reality little reflected in either contemporary or historical accounts of the period, which tend to privilege the conservative tone of Nixon Administration's public rhetoric and private correspondence.¹ Whilst it is clear that Richard Nixon had little personal or political interest in the process, the positive steps the Administration took to ensure peaceable compliance down South should not be ignored. Whatever our assessment of Richard Nixon as a moral creature, it must be observed that he supervised the formation of State Advisory Committees in each Deep South state, and lobbied Congress for money to help ensure a successful transition to a desegregated school

¹ A notable exception is Gareth Davies' *See Government Grow* (University Press of Kansas, 2007), which makes the case that Nixon's 'go softly' approach to school desegregation provided a valuable compliment to the moral urgency of HEW and the courts.

system in the region. With such an investment in the success of school desegregation, Richard Nixon's disillusionment with the tone of southern Republicanism intensified. Given the straight choice between policies that supported social order or pandered to GOP candidates, Nixon opted for peace not politics.

In South Carolina, the Democratic establishment made a similar choice. Having led the state's massive resistance movement in the 1950s, the prominent businessman Robert S. Davis now spearheaded the fight for public education. As head of a State Advisory Committee organised by the White House, Davis' contribution was so remarkable that he was cited by Attorney General John Mitchell as 'probably the best thing we have got going for us' amidst the social and political turmoil that summer. Prominent South Carolina Republicans played no positive role in this process. Campaigning for the Governor's Office, Albert Watson sought to exploit racial tension with astonishing recklessness. Despite its evident temptations, John West, the moderate Democratic candidate, eventually rejected school desegregation as a valid campaign issue and pursued a conciliatory, responsible course.²

Confronted by a similar dilemma, John West and Richard Nixon decided to cast aside personal gain in favour of the public interest. Albert Watson emphatically did not, and instead sought to capitalise on the very social disorder that Nixon's State Advisory Committee was attempting to forestall. Put starkly, the viability of Watson's campaign was predicated on the failure of a committee that enjoyed the full support of the Nixon White House. The reverse was also true, and yet Richard Nixon still remained firmly committed to Watson's cause. During the 1968 presidential campaign, the alliance between southern Republicans and Richard Nixon appeared mutually advantageous. Two years later, Nixon's commitment to peaceful school desegregation rendered it anachronistic. Encumbered with the complexities of governance, the President gravitated towards the subtle stylings of southern Democrats rather than the one-track thinking exhibited by his own party.

A Breach of Faith with Strom Thurmond

² Telephone Conversation between Elliot Richardson & John Mitchell (August 6, 1970), Box 127, Richardson Papers, LOC.

School desegregation enforcement by the Nixon Administration during the summer of 1970 pointed up the core paradox of the Richard Nixon's southern strategy. How could a President committed to enforcing judicial decrees satisfy hardline Dixie politicians dedicated to their abrogation? In essence, the President could not. More surprisingly, Nixon did not even persuade federal officials to tread this line carefully. In the capital of Thurmond's home state, Jerris Leonard, a senior Administration official, implied that the Senator had fervently supported a presidential candidate who had misled the public on the future of southern school districts under his administration. Meanwhile, behind the scenes Senator Thurmond persuaded numerous South Carolina school districts to voluntarily accept massive desegregation in spite of the potential local consequences. Instead of displaying appreciation for their efforts, Senator Thurmond and his staff felt insulted by federal officials who appeared deliberately obscurantist and unnecessarily ideological during negotiations.

By the end of July 1970, the relationship between the Senator and the White House had reached such a low ebb that Harry Dent remarked blackly, 'now at least the reporters can't say that Thurmond is running the Administration.' Whilst Nixon appeared sympathetic to the Senator's position, he did not take any substantive measures to relieve Thurmond's distress. On August 1, the journalist John Osborne asserted that Richard Nixon 'double-crossed his Southern supporters in 1968, [and] he has continued to do so since he took office.' Thurmond seemed to agree.³

Even before denouncing the Administration on the Senate floor in late July 1970, Senator Thurmond had already communicated his discomfiture and mounting anger to senior officials within the Nixon Administration. On May 18, 1970, Robert Mardian reported to Bryce Harlow, senior White House congressional liaison, that the South Carolina Senator 'may well attack the Administration on the Senate floor.' This time, Thurmond's ire was drawn by the absence of 'a satisfactory explanation of [the federal government's] handling of the Spartanburg School District No. 7 situation', which threatened to derail

³ 'The Deteriorating Political Situation in the South and Among Conservatives' (July 21, 1970), 'Southern GOP' (January - August, 1970), Folder 120, Box 7, Dent Papers; 'Nixon Watch' (August 1, 1970), *New Republic*, p. 13.

Republicanism in a flourishing metropolitan centre that had recently voted for the GOP for the first time since the Civil War. Political self-interest aside, the Senator's complaints revealed intense frustration with the Nixon Administration's civil rights enforcement. As Thurmond pointed out to Mardian, HEW negotiators seemed to evidence 'no concept of the guidelines set forth in the President's Statement on School Desegregation.' Whilst Thurmond privately understood that the Supreme Court had granted the White House little room for manoeuvre on the school desegregation question, he expected the process to be conducted in a manner sensitive to his own political position in South Carolina.⁴

Two events in mid-July 1970 convinced Thurmond that such sensitivity was not forthcoming, and it was consequently necessary to break with the Nixon Administration, albeit temporarily. With explicit presidential approval, the Inland Revenue Service (IRS) tightened the restrictions on tax exemption for racially segregated private schools, a course of action that even President Johnson had avoided. Political commentators regarded this manoeuvre as evidence that the Nixon Administration had begun to tack towards the centre-left; Strom Thurmond considered it an act of war. At a reception for southern Republican party officials in Washington D.C., the enraged South Carolina Senator confronted IRS Commissioner Randolph Thrower and Attorney General John Mitchell.⁵

Two days later, Thurmond read in the *Washington Post* that the Justice Department planned to send a hundred lawyers to oversee southern school desegregation when term began a month later. For a politician steeped in the mythology of the Old South, such an influx symbolised another wave of 'carpetbagging' northerners. Whilst the Senator might have expected such apparently 'vindictive...and anti-South' actions from the Johnson Administration, they were totally unacceptable from a President he had resolutely and consistently endorsed as a southern-friendly candidate and leader. Thurmond was particularly infuriated that

⁴ Robert Mardian to Bryce Harlow (May 18, 1970), 'HU 2-1 / ST 40 Education Schooling / South Carolina / Beginning - 12/31/1970', Box 15, Human Affairs Files, NARA; Strom Thurmond to Robert Mardian (April 27, 1970) in Harry Dent to Bryce Harlow (April 28, 1970), Folder 1, Box 2, Nixon-HEW Files, NARA.

⁵ David S. Broder & Philip S. Carter, 'President Warned About '72', *Washington Post* (July 18, 1970).

Jerris Leonard's public-relations assistant had chosen to call the *Charlotte Observer's* correspondent in Washington D.C. to leak the story, an act that seemed designed to hurt southern Republicans. Sensing treachery within the Nixon Administration, the Senator lashed out.⁶

Southern Republicans and the Nixon White House Torn Asunder

On the afternoon of July 17, 1970, Strom Thurmond took to the Senate floor to accuse the Nixon Administration of a 'breach of faith' with the South. In a foreboding passage plastered across the front page of both the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* the following day, Senator Thurmond warned Nixon that 'the people of the South will not support such unreasonable policies. I remind the Chief Executive that the presidency is an elective office, and that what the people give, the people will give away.' It was the first time that Strom Thurmond had publicly chastised Nixon since choosing to support him for the Republican presidential nomination two years earlier.⁷

Political cartoonists across the nation revelled in the Senator's amateur dramatics. The *Columbia State* carried a cartoon depicting Thurmond as the infuriated owner of a failed car labelled '1968 campaign,' confronting car salesman Nixon to demand 'What about my warranty?' Meanwhile, the *Washington Daily News'* editorial pages contained a cartoon that portrayed the South Carolina Senator as a spurned southern bachelor sitting on a rocking chair on his porch and screaming 'Is this your gratitude after I took you in?' at a hastily-departing President in drag. It is instructive that both cartoons portrayed Nixon as the devious charlatan, with Thurmond playing the role of naïve victim. John Osborne's sense of Nixon 'doublecrossing'

⁶ Harry Dent, 'Report on Meeting of Southerners and Other Conservatives with the President, Thursday, August 6, 1970 during the period 5:20 PM - 7:30 PM' (August 6, 1970), 'Beginning August 2, 1970', Box 81, President's Office Files, NARA. On August 4, 1970, Nixon told senior Administration officials that he 'had to take a position' on the IRS issue to ensure fulfilment of the President's 'legal, constitutional responsib[ility].' See: Untitled meeting notes, '8.4.70 (4.45P) / TT - VP - AG - Secs Kennedy, Richardson, Shultz. Finch, Harlow, Garment, H & E' (August 4, 1970), 'JDE Notes of Meetings with the President / 7/1/70 - 12/31/70 (1 of 8)', Box 4, Ehrlichman Files.

⁷ Walter Rugaber, 'Thurmond Warns Policy On Schools Can Defeat Nixon', *New York Times* (July 18, 1970); Broder & Carter, 'President Warned About '72'.

Thurmond pervaded media coverage of the event.⁸

Although the President quickly moved to pacify Thurmond, the cartoons accurately portrayed the broad truth that Nixon had chosen to decisively move away from southern Republican demands for retrenchment against civil rights enforcement. South Carolina voters certainly saw recent policy developments in these terms. After discussing Thurmond's political position with voters across the state, one correspondent reported to the Senator that, after warning Nixon on the Senate floor, white South Carolinians 'applauded and everyone said "Ole Strom is laying it on the line. I hope he keeps it up. Then when you tempered your remarks the words [became], "Strom is Crayfishing and it "ain't" going to help him."' Concluding that Senator Thurmond remained 'in deep trouble' back home as a result of his association with the national Administration, the writer insisted that 'if you hope to be reelected in 1972 you better "lambast" Richard Nixon at every opportunity. Don't let up.' Strom Thurmond's traditional Democratic base was clearly in revolt.⁹

That Thurmond did not follow this advice testified more to the compelling advantages of a fruitful relationship with the White House than President Nixon's ability to reframe school desegregation policy into a more southern-friendly cast. On August 3, 1970, veteran columnist Marquis Childs wrote in the *Washington Post* that despite 'the President backpedal[ing] a bit...nothing essential has changed.' For all Strom Thurmond's sermonising, he would not trade in the advantages of two years' firm loyalty to Nixon for a place back in the Washington D.C. wilderness. As John Osborne sagely noted in his column on the affair, Senator Thurmond's climb-down represented more a recognition of political reality than satisfaction with President Nixon's response.¹⁰

⁸ Editorial Cartoon, 'What about my warranty?', *The State* (c. 1970) and Editorial Cartoon, 'Is this your gratitude after I took you in?', *Washington Daily News* (July 21, 1970): both in Cartoon Series, Thurmond Papers.

⁹ Strom Thurmond to Harry Dent (August 26, 1970) 'South Carolina Politics (January - December, 1970)', Box 6, Dent Papers.

¹⁰ Marquis Childs, 'Nixon Aides Cross Fingers As Cities Escape Ghetto Riots', *Washington Post* (August 3, 1970); John Osborne, 'Nixon Watch', *New Republic* (August 1, 1970).

Few southern Republicans mirrored Thurmond's fealty to the Nixon White House. Of course, good reasons existed for his loyalty: none were consoled as effectively through patronage. As Nixon's stock plummeted across the region, few found good reason to stick by their party's figurehead in the White House. The problem was well articulated by an August 1970 memo from Howard 'Bo' Callaway, Nixon's southern coordinator in the 1968 election, that H.R. Haldeman recommended as requiring the President's personal attention. 'The prestige of the Administration in the South is now at its lowest point,' began Callaway, before announcing that, 'for the first time, Southern Republicans threaten open revolt.' In Callaway's mind, one issue dominated the southern political climate. 'Schools are the major issue in the South,' he explained, 'You could almost say that Schools are the only issue.'¹¹

As predicted by Callaway, southern GOP anger quickly bubbled to the surface. On August 11, 1970, the *Baltimore Sun* reported that 'at receptions, dinners, bill-signing ceremonies, picture-taking sessions and private unannounced meetings, President Nixon is getting a clear message from Deep South Republicans: tread softly on school desegregation this fall.' At one photo session with Nixon, William Dickinson, GOP Representative from Alabama's second congressional district, only half-jokingly observed, 'Mr President, I don't know if I should be seen smiling with you.'¹²

In the early evening of August 6, 1970, Dickinson was one of around a dozen prominent southern and southwestern Republicans who met with President Nixon in the Oval Office to discuss their express concern with the apparent 'change within the past thirty days of Administration policies toward the South and the overall question of school desegregation.' The meeting demonstrated that southern Republicans entertained little sympathy for Nixon's position on schools. Perhaps surprisingly, none considered the medium-term advantages rendered by quickly completing the process of school desegregation in terms of nullifying the

¹¹ Harry Dent to Richard Nixon, 'Meeting with Southern and Conservative Leaders: August 6, 1970, 5PM' (c. July / August 1970) & Howard Callaway to Richard Nixon, 'The Political Climate in the South' (August 3, 1970): both in '(CF) PL Political Affairs: 5-1-70 to (12-21-70) (1969-70)', Box 46, Political Affairs: 1969-1974, NARA.

¹² John B. Carroll, 'Nixon Lobbied On Integration', *Baltimore Sun* (August 11, 1970, 'School Compliance (January - November, 1970)', Box 6, Dent Papers.

issue by the 1972 elections. Even if those present held avowedly segregationist viewpoints, it also seemed obvious that the federal judiciary had severely constricted President Nixon's discretion in this area of policy. One can only conclude that southern Republicans remained stubbornly committed to a programme shaped by blockheaded short-termism.¹³

A prime example was the meeting's first speaker, Senator Barry Goldwater, who announced with disgust that 'the President had not changed the policies of this government in accord with the mandate that was given in the 1968 election.' Even assuming that Nixon had received an electoral mandate to reverse the federal commitment to southern school desegregation, Goldwater appeared to have forgotten that the Supreme Court had nullified the Nixon's Administration fledgling efforts to this end. Such strident rhetoric was matched by Goldwater's obvious contempt for Nixon's moderation regarding both policy and official insubordination. Six years earlier, Goldwater had overestimated the American people's appetite for genuine federal retrenchment. He now appeared keen for Nixon to repeat the mistake ¹⁴

Other attendees at the meeting shared Goldwater's disappointment with the ideological tenor of Nixon's recent domestic policy, albeit without the palpable sense of personal hostility.¹⁵ Jim Holshouser, chairman of the North Carolina GOP, explained that the President was now known throughout his state as 'Mister Integrator,' and would undoubtedly fail to carry North Carolina if an election was held the following day. Strom Thurmond offered the same conclusion for South Carolina: insisting that the report of a hundred 'mixing marshals' had instantly cost the President twenty-five thousand crucial votes at the next election in his state. A fortnight later, Thurmond wrote to Harry Dent to insist that Nixon 'will not get but a small percentage of the black vote,' and therefore should adopt a policy of 'fairness to blacks but not preference.'

¹³ Harry Dent, 'Report on Meeting of Southerners'.

¹⁴ Harry Dent, 'Report on Meeting of Southerners'.

¹⁵ The hostility was mutual. Having campaigned indefatigably for the Arizona Senator six years earlier, Nixon became resentful after learning of 'difference in what was done for Goldwater (after 1964) & what wasn't done for RN after 1960,' which included a three-strong research staff. See: Unsigned Note (Nixon's handwriting), 'Difference in what...!' (c.1965), 'Goldwater, Barry, 1965-1966', Box 2, Campaign 1968 Collection, Research Files, PPS 501, Nixon Library.

Fletcher Thompson, the ebullient Atlanta congressman who had regularly contacted Nixon about school desegregation at the start of the year, presented his case in blunter terms at the meeting. Pointing to the forty-three-percent vote that Wallace had received below the Mason-Dixon line in the tripartite 1968 presidential election, Thompson concluded that ‘we in the South are motivated by race.’ So, implied Thompson, should President Nixon.¹⁶

In private, Nixon liked to talk tough on civil rights. At one meeting with White House confidantes in late July 1970, the President emphatically described racially-diverse learning as ‘a low priority’ for his Administration. He was also conscious that there were ‘no votes in [the] deseg[regation of] sch[ools] in the So[uth].’ Nevertheless, throughout the summer of 1970 the President still insisted his staff follow the Supreme Court’s mandate of integration now and ‘do [the] job fairly, swiftly.’ As Bryce Harlow later recalled, ‘Nixon’s attitude on integration was that it was a hell of a problem that the country had to get past.’ Thus, on July 23, 1970, Nixon requested that chief-of-staff Haldeman instruct ‘all staff [that] P[resident] is a conservative, does not believe in integration, will carry out the law, nothing more.’¹⁷

Yet the stark reality was that ‘the law’ insisted on a level of school desegregation that was politically indefensible for Nixon’s southern allies. In Callaway’s words, this created ‘an atmosphere which encourages candidates to disassociate from the Nixon Administration in order to win elective office.’ Southern Republicans had found that capturing the White House did not necessarily prove an effective means of building up regional party infrastructure and office-holding. As one Democratic newspaper publisher in South Carolina wryly observed after the Burger Court handed down the *Alexander v. Holmes* decision the previous fall, ‘these things take on a different cast and hue when your man is the one doing things.’ The ‘strangely silent Republicans in South Carolina’ represented a very different political animal from the same

¹⁶ Harry Dent, ‘Report on Meeting of Southerners’.

¹⁷ Untitled Meeting Notes Beginning ‘7-28-70 (SC) 930A/ TT - H - E’ (July 28, 1970), ‘JDE Notes of Meetings with the President / 7/1/70 - 12/31/70 (1 of 8)’, Box 4, Ehrlichman Files; A. James Reichley, *Conservatives in an Age of Change* (The Brookings Institution, 1981), p. 188; H.R. Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries* (G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1994), p. 184.

individuals 'who were ready to shoot from the hip' every time they could accrue political capital by associating the national Democratic party with similar civil rights decisions.¹⁸

Thurmond's relationship with the Nixon Administration certainly precipitated a number of outcomes that were ideologically unlikely and politically unhelpful for the South Carolina Senator. During one White House strategy meeting held in early August 1970, Attorney General Mitchell wryly observed that, over the course of the preceding months, Strom Thurmond had 'desegregate[d] more sch[ool] districts than [the Departments of] HEW & Justice combined but he has to deny it.' When an Administration insider leaked details of Thurmond's role in promoting the successful negotiation of school desegregation plans in South Carolina, the Senator privately unleashed 'a big blast' against the Nixon Administration; well aware that the story would certainly 'hurt him politically' in South Carolina. On August 18, the executive director of the South Carolina Democratic Party mischievously mused to a reporter from the *Greenville News* that 'perhaps the federal marshals and lawyers who will be in the state this fall to enforce school desegregation will be able to do a little campaigning for their fellow Republican, Mr. Watson.'¹⁹

As the White House moved to the centre on civil rights issues, so its southern associates desperately fought to protect their exposed political flanks. In Texas, the Democratic candidate for U.S. Senator demanded that his Republican opponent, White House ally George H.W. Bush, persuade Nixon to personally override the desegregation plan covering Houston. The summer and fall of 1970 was an uncomfortable time for southern Republicans loyal to the national Administration.²⁰

¹⁸ Callaway to Nixon, 'The Political Climate in the South'; Fred Sheheen, 'Publisher's Commentary', *Camden Chronicle* (November 5, 1969), 'Schools, Folder II, November 1969 - April 1970', Box 16, Administrative Assistant Files, Thurmond Papers.

¹⁹ Untitled Meeting Notes Beginning '8.4.70 (4.45P) / TT - VP - AG' (August 4, 1970); Harry Dent to Bob Haldeman (July 31, 1970), 'South Carolina Politics (January - December, 1970)', Box 6, Dent Papers; 'Nixon's Popularity Has Slipped In South, S.C. Demo Official Says', *Greenville News* (August 18, 1970), 'South Carolina News Clippings', Box 5, Cabinet School Committee Files.

²⁰ Dana Mead to Edward L. Morgan, 'Casey's Two Questions' (September 1, 1970), Folder 6, Nixon-HEW Files, NARA.

President Nixon struggled in vain to square the circle. During the summer and fall of 1970, his relationship with the South accordingly assumed a Byzantine complexity. In a period when the White House demonstrated sincere commitment to concrete electoral gains in U.S. Senate and Governor races down South, it also presided over a domestic policy that threatened the viability of southern Republicans' electoral battles. Nixon's commitment to the work carried out across the South by the State Advisory Committees (SAC's), appointed by his White House's Cabinet Committee for Education to ease the transition to integrated schools, proved awkward for party growth below the Mason-Dixon line.

The reverse was also true, as southern Republican candidates posed a genuine threat to peaceful school integration. When the South Carolina SAC asked state gubernatorial candidates to leave education out of their campaigning, Albert Watson, a staunch Nixon ally, refused to do so. Whilst his Democratic opponent John West readily agreed, Watson declared that 'all candidates should address themselves to the issues regardless of the controversial nature.' Contrary to his loyalty in other areas of Administration concern, the Republican candidate for Governor in South Carolina would not be silenced on the issue of school integration. Watson's case was not unique. In Florida, Claude Kirk pursued a bid for re-election as Governor in similar style against the avowedly moderate campaign stylings of his Democrat opponent, Reubin Askew. As the President realised on meeting the State Advisory Committee leadership in New Orleans on August 14, 1970, the civic-minded southerners keen to negate the challenges to public education were principally Democrats, not Republicans.²¹

Unlike during the 1968 presidential campaign, Nixon had scant reason to prostrate himself at the altar of southern Republicanism. On June 16, 1970, the President received a memo from Harry Dent recommending that 'a non-partisan Nixon organization should be set up well in advance of the election in the south.' Concerned that Republican party organisations in the region were incapable of organising an effective state-

²¹ 'When an Issue Is Not an Issue', *Florence Morning News* (August 9, 1970), 'South Carolina - SAC - Robert Davis', Box 12 & Levona Page, 'No Room Here For Quality According To Color - Davis', *The State* (August 21, 1970), 'South Carolina News Clippings', Box 5: both in Cabinet Committee Files.

wide re-election campaign for the President two years hence, Nixon approved the suggestion. The partisan realignment anticipated by both Richard Nixon and southern Republicans in 1968 had begun to unravel. The White House's stance on school desegregation drove a further wedge between the two. As Nixon's multi-layered approach to civil rights enforcement increasingly clashed with the simplistic ideology of a Dixie GOP desperate to slow down the pace of racial reform, so the prospect of a genuine southern strategy receded into the ether.²²

Marrying Soft Words to Hard Deeds

On the issue of school desegregation, a key problem for southern Republicans lay in Nixon's apparent oscillation across the ideological spectrum. In his memo to the President, Bo Callaway described the impression that 'the Nixon Administration changes from day to day on its positions concerning Civil Rights and the South.' Whilst substantively inaccurate, this observation reflected President Nixon's intense concern that compliance with desegregation decrees would accrue 'no credit from the Blacks and a lot of harm from some of our white support.' In very basic terms, Nixon's 'political judgement is this is something we are doing that is right to do, but it is a serious political problem and setback in having to do it.' As a result, the President became hyper-sensitive about Administration officials conveying a tone sensitive to the feelings of the white South, and consequently indulged in misleading conservative rhetoric that did not reflect the basic tenor of his southern school desegregation policy.²³

As the new school year approached, Nixon became increasingly concerned about 'the tendency, primarily a tendency on Jerry Leonard's part, to get caught by the press giving the impression that we are ecstatic about bringing this to an end.' The federal marshal incident was a case in point. After Leonard leaked the story to

²² Harry Dent to John Brown (June 30, 1970), '(CF) PL Political Affairs: 5-1-70 to (12-21-70) (1969-70)', Box 46, Confidential Files: 1969-1974, NARA.

²³ Callaway to Nixon, 'The Political Climate in the South'; Telephone conversation between Elliot Richardson and H.R. Haldeman (July 28, 1970), 'Telecons - July 1970', Box 127, Richardson Papers.

the press, Nixon felt compelled to categorically deny that federal marshals would be dispatched into the South in the absence of an explicit request by local officials. In reality, this changed little. Federal bureaucrats would now simply head down South on a temporary basis, working out of either a U.S. Attorney's Office or a hotel room. The difference was one of presentation, not policy, since the Administration could now announce that 'no outposts will be established in the south.' Throughout the summer of 1970, Nixon persistently emphasised that all Administration officials should 'not make a big deal of all we're doing.' Still, no amount of polished rhetoric could conceal the fact that 'all we're doing' was enforcing a seismic social change in southern society.²⁴

As reality and rhetoric grew ever more dissimilar within the Nixon Administration, responsible administrators must have felt trapped in an Orwellian 'doublethink' dystopia. Elliot Richardson, Secretary of HEW, trod a particularly fine line. Parachuted into the position in early June 1970 as a replacement for the hapless Robert Finch, neither Richardson nor Nixon was thrilled with the appointment. Speaking privately, Richardson described the it as 'an unexpected development' that he felt he could not turn down, however much he would have preferred to stay on as State Department Under-Secretary. For Nixon's part, Richardson was second choice to Senator George Murphy of California. By August 1970, Richardson might well have wished Murphy had taken up the offer. When the new HEW Secretary terminated the funds of three southern school districts under Title VI, he considered himself subject to 'more blame than I deserved' from southern sympathisers at the White House. The morally-upright Massachusetts moderate would quickly learn that the Administration's domestic policy constituted a 'body of folklore' and little else.²⁵

The prime piece of folklore permeating the White House that summer was Nixon's opposition to 'kicking the South around.' That exact phrase had constituted one of Nixon's promises to southern GOP delegates prior to

²⁴ Telephone conversation between Richardson and Haldeman; Untitled meeting notes beginning, '7-28-70 (SC) 930A / TT - H - E', (July 28, 1970), 'JDE Notes of Meetings with the President / 7/1/70 - 12/31/70 (1 of 8)', Box 4, Ehrlichman Files.

²⁵ Telephone conversations between Elliot Richardson and Henry Shattuck (June 6, 1970), W.B.M. (June 6, 1970), John Ehrlichman (July 24 & August 13, 1970) & H.R. Haldeman (July 28, 1970): all in Box 127, Richardson Papers; 'Federal Fund Cutoff Ordered To 3 Dixie School Districts', *News & Courier* (July 3, 1970). 'Folklore' quote from Richardson conversation with Ehrlichman.

the Republican Convention in 1968. Now the President attempted to infuse the conduct of school desegregation policy with this inchoate goal. In a similar vein to the process of crafting the March 24 statement, the President responded to being trapped in an uncomfortable policy position by fastidiously regulating issues of style. The central philosophy of this policy was articulated by Harry Dent two years later as ‘the leadership to desegregate without bullets, bloodshed or bitterness’ through ‘the ending of sectionalism and bias against the South.’

At the time, Nixon summarised his attitude towards southern school desegregation more succinctly: ‘cooperation not coercion.’ The concept was fashioned by Ray Price, the ideologically moderate speechwriter whose first draft of the March 24 statement contained the line that, ‘in a free society, there are limits to the amount of coercion that can reasonably be used.’ Having included Price’s maxim in his final statement, Nixon adopted it as a leitmotif for the Administration’s execution of this most sensitive mandate. At a presidential news conference called on July 20, 1970, to insist that the allegations made about federal marshals heading South was ‘an action we have not taken and have no intention of taking,’ Nixon further elaborated that ‘our policy, in other words, is cooperation rather than coercion.’ The philosophy attached itself to the Nixon Administration’s desegregation policy so successfully that, on October 4, 1974, HEW Secretary Casper Weinberger used those exact words to summarise the recently-departed president’s approach to school integration.²⁶

Undoubtedly, the concept worked better as a mantra than coherent philosophy. When Ron Ziegler, White House Press Secretary, attempted to concisely explain the principle of ‘cooperation’ at a news conference, the assembled journalists roundly dismissed it as ‘hollow.’ Responding to reports in the *New York Times* that

²⁶ ‘Remarks of the President at a Press Conference in the President's Office’ (July 20, 1970), ‘Desegregation - Follow Up (CFOA 5019)’, Box 75, Garment Files; Peter E. Holmes to Hayes Mizell (October 8, 1974), ‘Ed: Desegregation: U.S. Dep’t of Health, Education & Welfare: Office of Civil Rights, 1973-1979 (2 of 2)’, Box 12, Mizell Papers. For other examples of usage of ‘cooperation not coercion’ formula in the White House, see: Leonard Garment to George P. Shultz (August 3, 1970), ‘Current School Desegregation (2 of 3)(CFOA 4698)’, Box 76, Garment Files, NARA; Untitled meeting notes beginning ‘7-28-70 (SC) 930A / TT - H - E (July 28, 1970)’, ‘JDE Notes of Meetings with the President / 7/1/70 - 12/31/70 (1 of 8)’, Box 4, Ehrlichman Files, NARA; Daniel Moynihan to Members of the Cabinet Committee on Education (July 23, 1970), ‘Cabinet Committee on Education - State Advisory Committees’, Box 4, Finch Files.

Nixon's statement on federal marshals had been erroneous, Ziegler argued that 'the President did not say that no Federal officials will be sent into the South unless asked,' but that he instead had 'said that the number of Federal officials would be dependent upon the request of local districts and states.' Pressed on how federal officials could possibly monitor compliance with school desegregation mandates if they were excluded from the South, Ziegler stonewalled by asking for 'your definition of monitor.' Time and time again, the beleaguered press secretary refused to associate the Administration with the enforcement of the law. Instead, he simply stated that 'the law of the land states very clearly that this must be achieved.' When one frustrated reporter demanded to know why Ziegler would not 'say that the Justice Department will enforce the law of the land,' Ziegler comically insisted that he had 'referred to it on several occasions.' The assembled media, notepads and tape-recorders in hand, could confirm that he had not.

Just as the White House had previously sent Ron Ziegler to publicly defend an impossible position during the furore over the Stennis Amendment six months earlier, so he had evidently been instructed to disassociate the Administration from the laws it was mandated to execute down South that fall. For a news media increasingly frustrated by lack of access to the President, Ziegler's words appeared ludicrous. Losing patience, one reporter spluttered that, '...in terms of people beating buses with clubs in Lamar, James Meredith in Mississippi, these are not hypothetical situations. These are not assumptions; these are track records.' The point was justified: how could compliance be guaranteed in a region that for sixteen years had practised Massive Resistance and, latterly, bureaucratic obfuscation? Ziegler's response only infuriated the amassed reporters further. 'Our policy,' he announced, 'is not to assume that these events that have occurred in the past will occur in the future.' Testifying to Senator Walter Mondale's Select Committee on Equal Educational Opportunities a fortnight later, John Mitchell adopted a similar line of response: repeatedly evading Indiana Senator Birch Bayh's questions about the level of federal involvement in southern school desegregation that fall. Instead, the Attorney General insisted that, 'we do not feel that there is going to be any great noncompliance with the court orders and agreements.'²⁷

²⁷ 'White House News Conference with Ron Ziegler' (July 31, 1970), 'Current School Desegregation (3 of 3)(CFOA 4698)', Box 77, Garment Files; Testimony of John Mitchell (August 13, 1970), Hearings, Select Committee on Equal Educational Opportunities, U.S. Senate, 91st Cong., 2d Session, p. 1896.

This was a smokescreen. The executive branch did not simply ignore the burden of history, and assume that white southerners would accept mass integration of their school system with placid good humour. To do so would have constituted gross negligence. On August 12, 1970, Elliot Richardson received a strategy memo from Stanley Pottinger, Leon Panetta's successor at the Office for Civil Rights, identifying potentially-troublesome school districts and proposing methods for tackling such disorder. Using data collected from OCR regional offices in Atlanta and Dallas, Pottinger attached a list of around 190 school districts. The document was digested by officials from both HEW and Justice. In line with the questions posed to Ziegler at the press conference, the policy document's stated concern was that incidents such as had occurred at Little Rock, Arkansas in 1957 and Lamar, South Carolina, earlier that year were likely to be repeated. Of equal concern was the frequency with which protest and social disorder of lesser magnitude had recently accompanied massive school desegregation in hundreds of school districts region-wide. Over the previous nine months in South Carolina alone, thirteen school districts had experienced white demonstrations or black boycotts, and in every single one local authorities anticipated that such activity would continue into the foreseeable future.²⁸

The proposed federal response to cases of civil disorder in desegregating school districts was relatively robust: ranging from the Justice Department seeking fines and injunctions to the real possibility that federal marshals be dispatched to serve 'as a physical presence on schools' through guarding entrances and exits. The sole qualification to this policy of federal enforcement was stipulated by Attorney General John Mitchell, who stressed that U.S. Marshals or the FBI limit their activities to acting as a physical presence or gathering intelligence. Referring to the Lamar incident, Mitchell insisted that any necessary remedial action on the ground be 'handled by local enforcement' troops. Taken in tandem with Mitchell's approach to the Lamar violence earlier that year, it created the impression that the Attorney General viewed his

²⁸ J. Stanley Pottinger to Elliot Richardson, 'Five Questions Below' (August 12, 1970), 'Current School Desegregation (2 of 3)(CFOA 4698)', Box 76, Garment Files.

responsibilities towards enforcing the law through a calculatingly political lens. Construed in these terms, the dictum ‘cooperation rather than coercion’ assumed a decidedly cynical aspect. It apparently compelled the Nixon Administration to adopt a policy of wilful negligence to retain the support of white southerners at the ballot box.²⁹

State Advisory Committees: The Southern Strategy as Good Governance

This is the southern strategy that permeates the majority of historical literature: the southern strategy of a President who ‘wanted the gutter all to himself,’ made ‘small but symbolically important’ steps in identifying itself with white Mississippi segregationists, and privately declared that African Americans lived ‘like a bunch of dogs’ and weren’t ‘gonna make it for 500 years.’ And yet the ‘cooperation not coercion’ dictum also produced a surprisingly-constructive blueprint for the peaceful desegregation of southern schools. At the White House strategy meeting wherein Mitchell insisted that enforcement of desegregation mandates would be handed over to local officials, the Attorney General also expressed confidence that the State Advisory Committees organised by the Cabinet Committee on Education would serve as the ‘best chance to keep it cool’ down South.³⁰

This was neither forlorn hope nor studied cynicism. Elliot Richardson, a staunch ideological moderate, enthusiastically agreed that a ‘good, close rel[ationship] w[ith] citizens g[r]oups [important] – voice of calm & network of relationships w[ith] Southern Sch[ool] Dist[ri]ct[s] being created.’ George Shultz, another political centrist heavily involved in the Cabinet Committee on Education, concurred that the State Advisory Committees were vital in giving key local personnel ‘the feeling [that] someone [is] interested in helping

²⁹ Stanley Pottinger to Elliott Richardson, ‘Five Questions Below’; Untitled meeting notes beginning ‘8.4.70 (4.45P) / TT - VP – AG’ (August 4, 1970), ‘JDE Notes of Meetings with the President / 7/1/70 - 12/31/70 (1 of 8)’, Box 4, Ehrlichman Files.

³⁰ Kenneth O’ Reilly, *Nixon’s Piano* (The Free Press, 1995), p. 283; Joseph Crespiro, *In Search of Another Country* (Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 231; White House Tapes Conversation between Richard Nixon, John Ehrlichman & H.R. Haldeman (May 13, 1971), Accessed at <http://whitehousetapes.net/clip/richard-nixon-john-erlichman-hr-haldeman-nixon-race> on January 27, 2011.

them solve their problems.’³¹

By presenting this seismic social change in positive, reassuring terms, senior officials within the Nixon Administration believed that serious disorder could be avoided. Undoubtedly, President Nixon had an electoral interest in ensuring peaceful desegregation. Whatever Mitchell said in private White House meetings, massive disorder would inevitably require high-profile federal intervention, with catastrophic effects on the Nixon Administration’s reputation down South. As veteran journalist Clayton Fritchey wrote in the *Washington Star*, the situation that gave Nixon ‘a cold sweat’ was the prospect of massive resistance causing Nixon to ‘uphold the law even if it cost him goodwill.’ For so long a voluble antagonist of racial integration, the President’s continued electoral viability in Dixie now demanded the peaceable massive desegregation of the region’s school system.³²

The Cabinet Committee for Education encapsulated the White House’s approach to school desegregation. Not only did the Committee discharge its responsibilities in a decidedly low-key manner, but it also explicitly disavowed any enforcement function. Instead, it focused on a pragmatic approach. The Committee’s cumbersome official mandate was to ‘amass information on the methods of desegregation, making the information available to communities in need of assistance,’ and allocate financial assistance to desegregating school districts. Whilst personal judgements would invariably intrude on these functions, it is significant that ideology was no barrier to participation in this project.³³

Instructively, both Harry Dent and Leonard Garment were crucial to the Committee’s formation. Whilst each

³¹ Untitled meeting notes beginning ‘8.4.70 (4.45P) / TT - VP – AG’ (August 4, 1970).

³² Clayton Fritchey, ‘Nixon May Learn About South the Hard Way’, *Washington Star* (February 2, 1970), ‘Civil Rights, Education, Desegregation, General, 1970 (Folder 2)’, Box 106, McNair Papers.

³³ Wallace Henley, ‘A History: School Desegregation and the Role of The Cabinet Committee on Education’ (November 1970): in private collection of Gareth Davies, Lecturer in U.S. History, Oxford University; Leonard Garment to Kenneth Cole (January 23, 1970), ‘Desegregation - State Advisory Committee (3 of 3) (CFOA 10178)’, Box 79, Garment Files.

entertained entirely different viewpoints on school desegregation, both believed that the process required ‘a coordinated program of cooperation rather than coercion.’ Their respective reasons were substantially different. In Dent’s view, ‘a Blue-Ribbon Southern group to study the effects on education quickly’ would help evidence the Administration’s ‘concern for education’ in the face of Wallaceite attacks. Cannily, Garment ignored the cynicism inherent in Dent’s proposal, and expanded it to include a group of ‘educators, businessmen, etc.’ During the initial stages of the Committee’s formation, Dent and Garment worked in tandem to contact prominent southern civic leaders for advice, and arrange administrative support for Committee members. Keeping Dent cooperative was crucial if Garment were to convince a sceptical President that the Committee was not a politically-naïve liberal indulgence. The gambit worked. By August 1970, even the relentlessly cynical John Mitchell was convinced that ‘Committees of V[ice] P[resident] Comm[ittee] are the Administration’s] best chance of keeping it cool [during southern school integration].’³⁴

The Cabinet Committee for Education's transformation into the White House’s most trusted strategy for peaceable school desegregation inevitably encountered resistance. The internal conflict within the White House between political cynicism and responsible governance, encapsulated in the battle over the March 24 statement, was exposed in its purest form during the Cabinet Committee’s gestation in the nine months prior to southern school openings in August 1970. Assigned the task of chairing the committee, Vice President Agnew categorically insisted that ‘he wanted no part of this effort.’ Shortly before Nixon flew to New Orleans to meet members of the State Advisory Committees, Agnew pleaded with the President not to go. ‘When the schools open,’ the Vice President warned, ‘there will be blood running through the streets of the South, and if you go, this will be blood on your hands. This is not your issue. Stay away.’³⁵

Unreconstructed southern Republicans evidenced similar concerns. When asked by two Nixon aides for his

³⁴ Harry S. Dent, *The Prodigal South Returns to Power* (John Wiley & Sons, 1978), p. 135; Leonard Garment to Ken Cole (January 23, 1970); Untitled and unsigned memo, ‘Methods of Procedure of a Panel on Educational Quality During Desegregation’, ‘Desegregation - State Advisory Committee (3 of 3) (CFOA 10178)’, Box 79, Garment Files.

³⁵ George Shultz, ‘How a Republican Desegregated the South's Schools’, *New York Times* (8 January 2003).

opinion on the President's trip to New Orleans, Clarke Reed, head of the southern Republican state chairman lobby, echoed Agnew's concern that President Nixon be 'so directly' associated with 'massive integration being ordered by the Courts [in the South] this Fall and over which the Administration had no control.' That Nixon rebuffed such advice was lauded as 'a courageous political move' by no less a staunch critic than Reg Murphy, the *Atlanta Constitution* editor who later that year would co-author a book savaging Nixon's southern strategy as cold-eyed racism.³⁶

More responsible characters than Agnew and Reed evidenced a similar level of disquiet, albeit for entirely different reasons. One unsigned White House memo demonstrated concern that the Committee might 'foster [the] illusion that Administration will help get around the law.' Initial appointments did little to persuade the South otherwise. After extensive internal lobbying by Harry Dent, the White House chose Robert Mardian, the ultraconservative HEW General Counsel, to serve in the key position of committee staff director. Ever since HEW officials had leaked a memo written by Mardian suggesting that school desegregation guidelines be secretly abandoned, the Arizonan had enjoyed a widespread reputation as a friend of the white South. In late February 1970, *The State* editorialised that Mardian's appointment represented one of 'a few encouraging silver linings interspersed with the dark clouds hovering over the school desegregation scene in South Carolina -- and elsewhere.'³⁷

Ultimately, Robert Mardian would prove a friend of the South, but not in the manner anticipated by *The State* newspaper. Rather than working to dilute desegregation orders, Mardian discharged his responsibility for

³⁶ Clarke Reed to Price Day (August 13, 1970), 'Cabinet Committee on Education - State Advisory Committees', Box 4, Finch Files; Reg Murphy, 'Move Election Day Forward or Back' *The Atlanta Constitution and Journal* (August 23, 1970), 'School Deseg - Fall 70', 'School Desegregation, 1954-1970, *Newsweek* Atlanta Bureau Files. Reg Murphy had co-authored *The Southern Strategy*, a severe denunciation of the Nixon Administration's prioritisation of electoral politics down South over responsible governance: see Hal Gulliver & Reg Murphy, *The Southern Strategy* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971).

³⁷ Untitled and unsigned memo (February 5, 1970), 'Desegregation - State Advisory Committee (3 of 3) (CFOA 10178)', Box 79, Garment Files; Harry Dent to John Mitchell, Bryce Harlow & John Ehrlichman (February 5, 1970), 'Agnew Committee (February - November, 1970)', Box 4, Dent Papers; 'Rose-Colored Glasses?', *The State* (February 27, 1970), 'Press Clippings: Cabinet Comm. (1970)', Box 12, Cabinet Committee on Education Files.

peaceable southern school desegregation with zeal and verve. Just as Pat Gray had quickly sensed the flaws in Nixon's southern strategy from his position by Finch's side at HEW,³⁸ so the ultraconservative Mardian's role as the committee's staff director inculcated a sense of the genuine problems that desegregation posed towards social order in the South, let alone the provision of public education. After the southern school year began relatively peacefully in the months of August and September 1970, Mardian evinced a genuine sense of elation and pride in the outcome of his labours: gushing down the telephone to Elliot Richardson that, 'if the story could be told, it is unbelievable. It is really great. How critical situations have developed.'³⁹

Even Harry Dent contributed positively to the process, recommending that Dr Richard Brannon, a moderate Baptist minister from Columbia, be put in charge of organising the South Carolina SAC. Brannon occupied very different ideological territory from Dent, as shown by a column the minister wrote for the *Columbia Record* in January 1970. Addressing the sensitive question of youth in society, Brannon concluded with words of encouragement to the young. Whilst 'some may not like your long hair,' he wrote, 'many of us do like the excellent principles you uphold. If we scream, it's because you hit us where it hurts.' That Dent chose Brannon for such a sensitive position demonstrated that even this wily South Carolinian understood the State Advisory Committees were expected to perform their duties effectively, rather than advance a specific political agenda. Had Dent's initial plan of organising a Blue Ribbon committee merely to push back against Wallace's demagoguery come to fruition, he surely would never have chosen a Baptist minister with such markedly centrist views. Fortunately, he did choose the impressive Brannon, who, over the course of two weeks intensive interviewing and cajoling, selected a superb committee.⁴⁰

Put simply, the Cabinet Committee for Education exhibited a sense of purpose that had previously been

³⁸ See Chapter Two.

³⁹ Telephone conversation between Elliot Richardson & Robert Mardian (September 14, 1970), 'Telecons - 1-15 September 1970', Box 127, Richardson Papers.

⁴⁰ Harry Dent to Neal Freeman (February 11, 1970), 'Brannon, Richard S. (February, 1970)', Box 4, Dent Papers; Robert Mardian to Sprio Agnew, 'Progress Report of State Advisory Committees' (July 6, 1970), 'Cabinet Committee on Education - State Advisory Committees', Box 4, Finch Files.

lacking from the Administration's conduct of school desegregation policy. As James A. Reichley has remarked, the whole affair provided 'an example of the invaluable contribution that a social establishment motivated by strong political leadership can bring to reform.' By virtue of defining clear goals, even political operatives like Harry Dent were compelled to contribute in a constructive fashion. That Spiro Agnew refused to involve himself in the process testified more to the Vice President's wayward compass than the Committee's own shortcomings. For over a year, President Nixon had presided over a school desegregation policy that deliberately sought to 'fuzz up' the issue for political purposes. By contrast, the Cabinet Committee enjoyed the liberty to execute their mandate without concern for its impact on southern electoral constituencies. Jerris Leonard's unvarnished comments in Columbia in April 1970 about the 1968 presidential campaign and the end of 'freedom of choice' undoubtedly proved troublesome for South Carolina Republicans. Nevertheless, Robert Mardian's insistence that segregated schools would vanish the following fall demonstrated that senior Administration personnel were authorised to speak with frankness to prevent destabilising confusion.⁴¹

Despite Senator Thurmond's complaints and Leonard's comments' widespread dissemination in the regional press, the Nixon White House issued no sanction against either Jerris Leonard or Robert Mardian. In fact, senior Administration officials had actively encouraged the visit to Columbia so desperately opposed by Thurmond. On March 31, 1970, Jerris Leonard sent John Ehrlichman a proposed timetable for the Administration's involvement in the school desegregation issue that included several meetings with southern officials. John Ehrlichman, whom Nixon had recently encharged with supervising 'operational' issues on this matter, found Leonard's suggestions 'entirely satisfactory,' but suggested more meetings were held 'to get some visibility and notoriety in other areas of the South as well.' As a result of these instructions, Leonard arranged the Columbia meeting. On this most vital of domestic issues, clarity finally superseded calculated obfuscation.⁴²

⁴¹ A. James Reichley, *Conservatives in an Age of Change*, p. 189. For a full account of this episode, see the preceding chapter.

⁴² Jerris Leonard to John Ehrlichman, 'Execution of Directions from the President per his Statement' (March 31, 1970)

Having committed his Administration to protecting the forthcoming system of desegregated southern public education, President Nixon remained convinced that a mantra of ‘cooperation not coercion’ would represent effective governance as well as sound politics. Issuing marching orders to senior Administration officials on August 4, 1970, Nixon insisted that a ‘low profile’ strategy refusing to indulge in ‘kicking the South around’ combined the ‘best...philosophy’ as well as a ‘politically’ viable approach. To illustrate his point, the President explained that ‘demagogues can force confrontations’ when confronted with high-profile federal intrusion in their home states. Those present in the Oval Office that day would certainly have remembered the Lamar incident, when Albert Watson had responded to the media storm over mid-year court-ordered desegregation by inciting a crowd of angry upstate South Carolinians to ‘stand up’ for their rights through any means necessary. In light of these instructions, it is easy to see why the President announced he ‘could wring [Jerris Leonard’s] neck’ for leaking the story about a hundred federal marshals heading South to enforce desegregation. Even a loyal Administration supporter like Strom Thurmond could not stand by idly when confronted with such unnecessary braggadocio.⁴³

Understandably, career bureaucrats had little interest in such finesse. Many had experienced years of obfuscation on the part of southern officials keen to avoid genuine school desegregation without incurring financial penalties or federal lawsuits. Paul Rilling, former Southeastern Regional Director of HEW’s Office for Civil Rights, observed in June 1970 that the average African-American child who entered the first grade in 1954, the year of the *Brown v. Board* decision, had graduated high school without ever attending racially integrated classes. Now that the federal government’s duty to integrate southern schools was finally being discharged, civil rights bureaucrats in HEW and the Justice Department perceived no good reason why the process should be undertaken in a manner sensitive to those responsible for such acute delay.⁴⁴

& John Ehrlichman to Jerris Leonard, ‘Execution of President’s School Desegregation Policy’ (April 1, 1970): both in ‘314 Committee on Educational Quality (1 of 2)’, Box 30, Ehrlichman Files.

⁴³ Untitled Meeting Notes Beginning ‘8.4.70 (4.45P) / TT - VP – AG’ (August 4, 1970).

⁴⁴ Testimony of Paul Rilling (June 15, 1970), Hearings, Select Committee on Equal Educational Opportunities, U.S.

A few days before Nixon was due to receive the Mississippi State Advisory Committee at the White House for an afternoon of delicate persuasion, an official within the Bureau of the Budget decided to rename the tactfully phrased Cabinet Committee on Education as the Cabinet Committee on School Desegregation. The name change was anathema to Patrick Gray, who fumed to HEW Secretary Robert Finch that 'not one white member of a State Advisory Committee can stand up in public and generate public support for desegregation. They can advance the cause of developing a unitary school system of preserving public education, and of improving the quality of education. Semantics, perhaps, but not in the Southern States.' If the Cabinet Committee sincerely desired to use white civic leaders to dampen down public disquiet with massive school desegregation, it could not reasonably expect them to do so by proselytising the merits of the *Brown* decision.⁴⁵

The task was already difficult enough. Many prominent southerners contacted about serving on the committee held deeply ingrained suspicions about the Administration's motives. Only one out of six Mississippians contacted by the Cabinet Committee provisionally agreed to serve. Few expected anything but disaster. One pessimistic Atlantan colourfully reported to Pat Gray that 'you will have as much chance of succeeding in this endeavor as you would have in explaining to your wife that adultery is merely a joyous frolick.' Whilst emphatic, the simile was misleading. Gray's response is not recorded, but one can imagine him retorting that committee members were not expected to defend infidelity, but fight for the institution of marriage itself. By the summer of 1970, all but the most delusional of southerners realised that the battle had moved away from preserving a segregated past to moulding the future of a fully integrated system of public education. In the South Carolina gubernatorial race, even Albert Watson switched tack from openly advocating resistance to attacking the chaos he believed would proceed from school integration. By early August 1970, only the third-party Wallaceite candidate suggested that federal school desegregation decrees

Senate, 91st Cong., 2d Session, p. 970.

⁴⁵ Patrick Gray to Robert Finch (June 16 & June 22, 1970): both in 'Cabinet Committee on Education', Box 3, Finch Files.

should be openly defied.⁴⁶

Depoliticising Desegregation: The South Carolina State Advisory Committee at Work

Just weeks before schools opened in August 1970, Robert S. Davis, Chairman of the South Carolina SAC, bluntly explained to President Nixon that ‘I personally prefer freedom-of-choice.’ Nevertheless, Davis continued, ‘I just can’t comprehend’ the alternative: white parents abandoning the state’s public schools *en masse* in favour of lilywhite private provision. Once a leader in South Carolina’s Massive Resistance movement, Robert Davis now fought to protect integrated classrooms from closure with slogans insisting that ‘education is the most important thing’ and pleading citizens to ‘keep your cool and support your school.’ Davis was typical of the civic leader sought by the Cabinet Committee to promote public education in the South. As Chairman of the R.L. Bryan Company, a prominent publishing house based in the state, he occupied a position of authority over hundreds of employees and also commanded the respect of many South Carolinians state-wide. As John Mitchell explained to a meeting of senior White House officials, when Robert Davis spoke, he was ‘understood by the politicians and the community’. Furthermore, the Attorney General admitted shortly before schools opened in August 1970 that the calibre of such SAC committee members was ‘probably the best thing we have going for us.’⁴⁷

Crucially, Davis had ‘little or no identification with prior biracial groups or efforts.’ He could therefore act as the archetypal Deep South moderate: a man who ‘prefer[ed] freedom of choice,’ but who also realised that the alternative to desegregation was unthinkable. Like Robert McNair’s brave speech in Greenville at the

⁴⁶ Patrick Gray to Cabinet Committee on Education, ‘Georgia State Advisory Committee’ (June 29, 1970), ‘Agnew Committee (February - November, 1970)’, Box 4, Dent Papers; Pat Gray to Robert Finch (June 16, 1970); ‘Bethea Says Would Force U.S. To Send Troops’, *The Anderson Independent* (August 3, 1970), ‘South Carolina News Clippings’, Box 5, Cabinet Committee on Education Files.

⁴⁷ B.J. Richey, ‘S.C. Citizen Panel Adopts "Soft-Sell" for School Peace,’ *The Long Island Press* (August 23, 1970), ‘South Carolina News Clippings’, Box 5, Cabinet Committee on Education; Telephone conversation between Elliot Richardson & John Mitchell (August 6, 1970), ‘Telecons – August 1970’, Box 127, Richardson Papers.

beginning of the year, Davis insisted that time had run out on the state's segregated school system. The moral question of racial equality was simply left unaddressed. The White House Cabinet Committee sensibly accepted the compromise, insisting that 'we will not ask SAC members to publicly support Administration policies, since such policies may not be completely consistent with their own personal convictions.' Robert Davis intuitively understood this instruction, and the advantages it held for his own position within the state. It was no accident that his remarks to President Nixon about preferring 'freedom of choice' desegregation plans were leaked to the South Carolina and national press.⁴⁸

Robert Davis and the South Carolina SAC's approach to promoting peaceful compliance with school desegregation mandates was reminiscent of moderate parents' successful campaign against Massive Resistance in the Deep South of the 1950s. In *The Silent Majority*, Matthew Lassiter described the work of Help Our Public Education (HOPE): a grassroots group in Atlanta, Georgia, that managed to 'dramatically reshape [the contemporary] political debate' by deracialising the argument itself. Instead of claiming the moral high-ground in the debate over whether schools should be closed rather than racially integrated, HOPE insisted that its primary desire was to protect children's education. Such a goal, its coalition of white suburban parents argued, could not be accomplished without a state-supported school system. This approach to school reform was reflected in HOPE's membership requirements. Adopting a whites-only policy to broaden their potential support base, HOPE also insisted on new recruits swearing a loyalty oath that included a denouncement of communism.⁴⁹

In a similar vein, the South Carolina SAC sought to promote public education rather than advance racial progress. That the committee did not seek to upset the *status quo* was evidenced by the racial make-up of its

⁴⁸ Robert Mardian to Spiro Agnew, 'State Advisory Committee on Public Education' (June 18, 1970), 'Agnew Committee (February - November, 1970)', Dent Papers. Davis was so influential that in November 1967, one civil rights activist expressed a wish that he would one day turn his attentions to civil rights reform. See: Hayes Mizell to Barbara Moffett et al, 'Appearance at Meeting of Task Force for Community Uplift or How The System Works in South Carolina' (November 22, 1967), 'Community Relations: Taskforce for Community Uplift, 1967', Box 7, Mizell Papers.

⁴⁹ Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton University Press, 2006), pp. 45, 66-7 & 102-4.

leadership. Like every other SAC, the South Carolina committee's chairman was white, and vice chairman, Maceo Nance, black. Moreover, Nance's inoffensive 'super-salesman' advocacy of African-American concerns was unlikely to overturn white racial stereotypes. John West, the Democratic gubernatorial nominee, patronisingly described Nance in his diary as possessing, 'all the attributes of the old Southern negro who used to "yassuh" you to death and take the last dollar out of your pocket.'⁵⁰

Nance's appointment was no accident. Robert Davis admitted that his committee had no truck with moralising the issue, and openly explained that at no time did the South Carolina SAC insist that 'desegregation was right or humane or Christian.' Those concerned with easing tensions at a local level adopted Robert Davis' tactics, and redefined the principal issue as a simple issue of preserving decent public education. When the mayor of Myrtle Beach convened meetings on the subject during the summer vacation between civic authorities and a wide range of community representatives, he noticed that all parties involved soon dropped the terms 'integration' and 'desegregation' from discussion.⁵¹

In a similar vein, schools downplayed the transition's historical significance, even in instances where it was truly remarkable. In the state capital of Columbia, Booker T. Washington High School (BTW) had performed a high profile role in the local black community since the early twentieth century. Despite its reputation for excellence amongst African-American residents, not one white parent had ever sought a place there for their child under 'freedom of choice' plans. In early August 1970, BTW was preparing to desegregate for the first time. To smooth the admissions process, shortly before term began the school held 'open house days' to familiarise incoming pupils with their new learning environment. White parents whose children had been

⁵⁰ 'September Songs for Dual Schools', *The Ripon Forum* (October 1970), p. 19; John West Diary Entry (February 17, 1971), 'West, Personal, Diary, 1971, 19 Jan – Feb', Box 21, West Papers. When President Nixon visited New Orleans to meet with the leadership of the seven State Advisory Committees on August 14, 1970, young black activists protested conservative appointees like Maceo Nance: see Roy Reed, 'Nixon Reassures South On Schools', *New York Times* (August 15, 1970).

⁵¹ 'South Carolina Keeps Desegregation Calm?', *Cleveland Plain Dealer* (September 28, 1970), 'Cabinet Committee on Education - State Advisory Committees', Box 4, Finch Files; William DuRant, 'Mayors Receive Briefing On School Desegregation', *Florence Morning News* (August 20, 1970), 'South Carolina News Clippings', Box 5, Cabinet Committee on Education.

reassigned to BTW were greeted at the door by volunteer students sporting 'Quality Education First' pin badges.⁵²

Just a few years earlier, such badges would have been worn by whites who considered the potential desegregation of BTW an educational catastrophe. Conveniently ambiguous, southern politicians had adopted the slogan during the 1960s to imply that their opposition to school desegregation was rooted in colour-blind concern with adverse learning outcomes rather than the crude racist theories so toxic to national opinion. Even though South Carolina's school system languished at the bottom of national performance tables, the argument held great weight with the majority of white South Carolina. Evidently their measurements of 'quality education' were rather more rooted in indices of racial separation than test results. According to state-wide statistics from 1969-1970, one third of the state's teachers were under-qualified, more than 75,000 children were not enrolled in school, and 10,000 children annually repeated the first grade. With such statistics, pointed out a prominent South Carolina civil rights activist, 'how can we talk about "maintaining quality education?" What is there to "maintain?"'⁵³

For members of the State Advisory Committee, the answer was 'plenty.' Responsible South Carolinians were desperate to maintain a system of public education that could prepare the state's children with skills required to survive in a new economy that had little use for illiterate farm hands. As Governor McNair patiently explained to a former colleague from the state legislature several years earlier, 'the demands of today and the future' mandated an effective system of public education. 'Business, particularly industry,' insisted McNair, 'requires a high-school diploma and you can see that we are not turning out an adequate number to fill these jobs.' When Robert Davis told President Nixon that he could not imagine a future for South Carolina without a proper system of state-funded education, this captain of industry meant his words literally. 'Business depends on public education for the products to run companies,' lectured Davis to the *South Carolina*

⁵² Karen D. Metcalfe, 'BTW's Richburg Optimistic', *The State* (August 6, 1970), 'South Carolina - Columbia - Booker T. Washington H.S.', Box 27, Cabinet Committee on Education Files.

⁵³ Hayes Mizell, 'The Myth of Quality Education', *New South* 26:1 (Winter 1971), pp. 29-30.

Education Journal, 'The quality of the product is going to determine the quality of business in South Carolina.' The SAC chairman's own career testified to the authenticity of his words. In 1933, Robert Davis' home-room teacher at Columbia High School had launched the R.L. Bryan President's career by recommending he be employed as a 'stock boy' at a local city firm.⁵⁴

The economic consequences of closing down even a relatively small number of public schools would have proven dire, not least since the lilywhite academies that sprung up in the state could just not afford the same standard of educational provision offered by public schools. Reliant on private donations and meagre tuition fees, their limited revenue stream meant offering white pupils a segregated classroom but little else. Whereas leading private schools in the South charged fees as high as a thousand dollars per annum, the typical segregation academy charged less than a third of that figure. One correspondent to *The State* estimated that Richland County No. 1's audio-visual budget alone probably exceeded the total school budget for any independent school in South Carolina. For a three-dollar filing fee, anyone could set up a private school in the state. That year, twenty new lilywhite private academies sprung up in South Carolina: the greatest number in recent history. Cyril Busbee, the state's ebullient superintendent of education, evinced contempt for such institutions. 'All you have to do to open a private school in South Carolina,' Busbee complained darkly, 'is to have a spare stable.'⁵⁵

At the South Carolina SAC's first press conference on July 30, 1970, Davis outlined three potential choices for the state's citizens. 'We can have good schools,' he began, 'we can have inadequate schools, or we can have no public schools at all.' The last two options, explained Davis, were simply untenable. A week earlier,

⁵⁴ Robert McNair to Thomas R. Miller (March 8, 1966), 'General, 1965-1966', Box 30, McNair Papers; 'The Committee That Cares,' *South Carolina Education Journal* (Fall 1970), pp. 8-9, in The Cabinet Committee on Education, 'Inflow' (October 12, 1970), 'Cabinet Committee on Education, Box 3, Finch Files.

⁵⁵ Mrs John B. Carlock to the editor of *The State* (August 5, 1971), 'South Carolina, Clippings (1970-1971)', Box 2, Cabinet Committee on Education; Claude Sitton, 'South's Schools Face Evil Days', *Charlotte News & Observer* (October 26, 1969), 'School Desegregation Progress, 1969', School Desegregation, 1954-1970, *Newsweek* Atlanta Bureau Files; 'South Carolina Keeps Desegregation Calm?', *Cleveland Plain Dealer* (September 28, 1970); Robert Joseph Steeley, 'A History of Independent Education in South Carolina' (PhD Thesis, USC, 1979), pp. 90-95.

the SAC Chairman had anticipated the same theme in a letter written to his own employees at the R.L. Bryan Company plant in South Carolina, insisting that future prosperity for the whole company ‘depends on the successful operation of our schools this fall.’ Promising that ‘quality education’ would be sustained locally, Davis signed off by invoking what would become a core slogan of the SAC committee. ‘Let us not forget,’ he noted in language carefully capitalised, ‘Education is the Important Thing.’” Using a paean to economic development to forge a viable compromise between the state’s segregated past and a putative biracial future, the South Carolina SAC set to work. Russell Mellette, the committee’s staff director, explained the strategy to an inquisitive reporter from the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* in late-September 1970. ‘We went to bat for public schools,’ Mellette surmised, ‘We didn’t endorse integration or any of the [desegregation] plans. We just made the pitch that public education was too important to go down the drain.’⁵⁶

Robert Davis’ letter to his employees at the R.L. Bryan Company provided a useful template for other business leaders to follow within their own companies. For example, the South Carolina SAC persuaded both Southern Bell and Thomas & Howard Grocers to issue the same letter to their employees in Columbia. Businesses throughout the state showed a similar willingness to exercise leadership on the issue. After meeting with SAC members, the four major industrial plants in the midlands city of Barnwell each agreed to help garner support for public education amongst their employees. The composition of the SAC committee helped procure such support. A mixture of bankers, lawyers and businessmen supplemented the more obvious choices of politicians and senior educators. Davis apart, John Cauthen represented the most influential committee member. A former prominent textile lobbyist, Cauthen was rated by state Republicans as the leader of the South Carolina establishment. Described a few years earlier by journalist John Osborne as a ‘seamed, lively, intelligent man,’ Cauthen was a trusted associate of Governor McNair. When the Governor was informed in early January 1967 that the U.S. Department of HEW wished to establish closer

⁵⁶ Paul Wesley McNeill, ‘School Desegregation in South Carolina, 1963-70 (PhD Thesis, University of Kentucky, 1979), pp. 81 – 82; Unsigned letter, ‘To Residents of School District No. 1’ (July 21, 1970), ‘Richland No. 1’, Box 8, ‘School District File’, Division of Administration & Planning, Office of Technical Assistance & Surveys, State Department of Education Files, South Carolina State Archives; Robert J. Havel, ‘South Carolina Keeps Desegregation Calm?’, *Cleveland Plain Dealer* (September 28, 1970).

links with the South Carolina government, McNair instructed an aide to 'Call John Cauthen and let John go run this.'⁵⁷

The 'Conspiracy of Peace' Reigns Once More

In contrast with other State Advisory Committees, the South Carolina committee enjoyed strong links with state government. This was perhaps unsurprising, given that its members comprised two former chairmen of the State Board of Education, two executive members of the State Public Service Authority, the State Coordinator for Adult Education, the President of the South Carolina Educational Resources Foundation, and the Vice President of the State Board of Education. Nevertheless, another necessary factor in this effective working relationship was the state government's own commitment to preserving the cause of public education. The State Department of Education, in particular, worked tirelessly with teachers and school board members to develop and execute desegregation plans as smoothly as possible. As Robert Davis generously explained to one reporter, 'They've all built the foundations...they're the real heroes of public education in South Carolina.'⁵⁸

At the centre of this process was Cyril Busbee himself, the state's superintendent of public education from 1967 to 1979. Elected handily in 1966 without a single mention of racial issues in his campaign material,

⁵⁷ Unsigned letter, 'To Residents of School District No. 1' (July 21, 1970); Rodman Lemon to Robert Davis (August 25, 1970), in Robert Mardian to Spiro Agnew, 'Cabinet Committee on Education Activity Report' (September 9, 1970), 'Cabinet Committee on Education,' Box 3, Finch Files; Robert Mardian to George Shultz, 'South Carolina State Advisory Committee on Public Education' (July 22, 1970); 'Cabinet Committee on Education,' Box 4, Finch Files; James Duffy to 1970 Committee (October 3, 1968), Folder 112, Duffy Papers, Clemson; Notes, 'South Carolina - Columbia - 1/18/66 - John K. Cauthen' (January 18, 1966), 'Research Material, South Carolina, 1965-66, n.d.', Box 85, Osborne Papers; Robert J. Havel, 'South Carolina Keeps Desegregation Calm?', *Cleveland Plain Dealer* (September 28, 1970); Handwritten note attached to: William J. Page to Robert McNair (January 25, 1967), 'Health, Education and Welfare, Dept of, General, 1967', Box 85, McNair Papers.

⁵⁸ Levona Page, 'Nixon Group Outlines School Mixing Goals', *The State* (July 31, 1970), 'Press Clippings: Cabinet Comm. (1970)', Box 12, Cabinet Committee on Education Files; Robert Mardian to George Shultz, 'South Carolina State Advisory Committee on Public Education' (July 22, 1970).

Busbee's slogan that year was the pluralistic, if unambitious, 'Adequate Educational Opportunity For All.' Two years later, Busbee was one of a select group of white civic leaders brave enough to attend an NAACP dinner for Roy Wilkins in Manning, S.C. Busbee had long argued that the state should 'respect and abide by the law,' accepting that 'the law is often interpreted by the courts.' Despite bearing unconscious signs of his Deep South upbringing, such as upsetting black audiences with use of the word 'nigra,' as early as January 1967 Busbee used a speech to the South Carolina School Boards Association as a platform to announce that 'we cannot [any] longer ignore our responsibility for narrowing the gap between education of Negro children and other children.'⁵⁹

With Busbee providing professional expertise, between the seventeenth and twentieth of August 1970 the South Carolina committee embarked on a four-stop tour across the state. Visits to Florence, Columbia, Charleston and Greenville ensured that the meetings were sufficiently geographically diverse to be easily accessible to all. Every single one of South Carolina's 256 mayors was invited to attend as 'the most direct route into the most communities on very short notice;' supplemented with a variety of other significant local figures. In total, approximately 125 civic leaders attended one of the four sessions: ranging from Belton's Chief of Police to the City Manager of Aiken. The meeting held in Florence on August 19, by no means the largest of the four, was attended by five city councilmen and sixteen mayors.

The meetings' structure conformed to an effective pattern. The role of presiding officer and opening prayer-giver were undertaken by members of the SAC committee with local connections. The presiding officer would begin by explaining 'the creation, purpose and functions of the Committee, and outlin[ing] suggested community action projects' which would be subsequently handed out in written form. Comments would then be solicited from the floor. Sometimes these came in the form of questions. For example, two mayors

⁵⁹ 'The Committee That Cares,' *South Carolina Education Journal* (Fall 1970), p. 9; John V. O'Neill, 'NAACP Executive Director Praised At Dinner', *The State* (November 2, 1968); Collection of Cyril Busbee campaign materials, 'Busbee, Cyril B., 1966', Box 3, Hamby Papers; Hayes Mizell to Barbara Moffett et al., 'Participation on panel at Claflin College' (June 29, 1967), 'Mizell, AFSC: ED: Desegregation: SC Community Relations Program, 1967-1974', Box 11, Mizell Papers.

expressed frustration with the difficulty in communicating properly with local school officials. The SAC committee promised to mediate, but only if formally invited. They did not wish to become embroiled in tricky local disputes.

Impressively, the bulk of comments from local officials took the form of reports or pledges of community-level action to anticipate and nullify any potential problems when schools opened. The mayor of Marion insisted that ‘every recommendation of the Committee had already been accomplished or would be carried out in Marion prior to school opening,’ and suggested that other communities copy their practice of publishing forthcoming school arrangements in local newspapers. Aiken’s mayor reported substantial official discussion of the forthcoming school year had already taken place, alongside efforts undertaken by youth groups, and that schools planned ‘open houses’ to assimilate pupils into their new learning environment. A representative from Charleston County explained that their local biracial committee had conducted ‘community relations workshops,’ and proposed more black representation on local school boards ‘to establish more meaningful communications’ between the two races. These meetings did not simply involve the SAC committee lecturing local elected officials, but quickly flourished into a forum for constructive debate about the most effective means of preserving public education.⁶⁰

The impact of the meetings can be judged by a letter from Rodman Lemon, the mayor of Barnwell, to Robert Davis on August 25, 1970, just a few days after Lemon had attended the state committee meeting in Columbia. According to Lemon, the meeting had precipitated a cavalcade of constructive action in Barnwell. The following day, the city council convened a special session at which it was decided that Davis’ advice would be pursued through a school ‘open house’ followed by a biracial community meeting to be held within the week. The latter event enjoyed ‘excellent turnout considering such short notice,’ and the local school superintendent answered questions from local community leaders about the new education arrangements in

⁶⁰ Minutes and attendance lists at the four meetings contained in ‘Agnew Committee (February – November, 1970)’, Box 4, Dent Papers.

the city.

In large part ‘due to the excellent suggestions and help by you and your committee,’ Lemon concluded, ‘our schools will open Thursday and we anticipate no trouble.’ The mayor was right. On August 27, 1970, Barnwell County’s schools opened without major incident. This was quite remarkable. In late January 1969, the county’s funds had been terminated by the fledgling Nixon Administration as a result of acutely segregated schools in flagrant violation of Title VI guidelines. A reporter from *Newsweek’s* Atlanta bureau had visited the city, and been struck by the ‘ever-present consciousness of old line aristocratic way of life.’ White racism remained commonplace. The Barnwell school superintendent privately told ‘of citizens who would get so upset about the prospect of integration that they would choke up and be unable to talk.’ Just twenty months later, the county’s schools were completely integrated.⁶¹

In Barnwell, as in the rest of South Carolina, strong community leadership undoubtedly helped to ensure a relatively smooth transition to racially-integrated schools. Another vital factor was a strong public-relations campaign emphasising that public education was more important than a segregated, and financially impoverished, school system. Reporters from local television and newspaper outlets covered each of the four regional meetings. Before the Charleston event, Dr. Maceo Nance, SAC Vice Chairman and that evening’s presiding officer, was even interviewed by two local television stations. In Florence, the editor of the local paper was so impressed with the committee’s ‘positive [and] realistic’ solutions to the desegregation imbroglio that he offered to publish a full-page advertisement for its work without charge. Since the *Florence Morning News* was the only daily newspaper in eastern South Carolina, this represented a fantastic piece of

⁶¹ Rodman Lemon to Robert Davis (August 25, 1970), in Robert Mardian to Spiro Agnew, ‘Cabinet Committee on Education Activity Report’ (September 9, 1970), ‘Cabinet Committee on Education - State Advisory Committees’, Box 4, Finch Files; Brian K. Landsberg to Jerris Leonard, ‘Status of South Carolina School Systems’, (September 6, 1970), ‘(Black Binders) Status of School Openings / Fall 1970 (CFOA 5019)’, Box 79, Garment Files; ‘DPR Collect: Nation from cumming’ (February 7, 1969), ‘Barnwell, S.C., Abbeyville, S.C. 2/6/69’, Folder 17, Box 2, *Newsweek* Atlanta Bureau Records.

publicity.⁶²

Impressively, the Columbia meeting was covered by B.J. Richey of Newhouse Newspapers, headquartered in Washington, D.C. When asked to explain his motivation for attending by presiding officer Robert Davis, Richey answered that the White House had reported South Carolina as ‘where the action is’ for a newsman covering the Cabinet Committee’s State Advisory Committees. In his article on the committee, Richey concluded that the White House’s information was correct, finding that the South Carolina committee had hired a full-time executive director, and held quickly organised meetings across the state. By contrast, no other SAC had hired any staff members, and the majority had barely begun to organise by the time that the South Carolina committee had held four meetings state-wide. Even President Nixon publicly testified that South Carolina was ‘the state to follow’ in achieving peaceable school desegregation. Typically, Strom Thurmond had nothing to say about the school committee's efforts in his home state.⁶³

Thurmond's attitude was more common in other Deep South states. Unlike South Carolina, Mississippi’s SAC proved a serious disappointment. Two members of that committee headed banks responsible for funding a \$600,000 loan to private ‘segregation academies,’ whilst its chairman rather conveniently departed to Africa on safari for most of August. Indeed, so impressed was HEW Secretary Elliot Richardson with the ‘real good’ South Carolina committee that he intended to solicit their ‘advice and knowledge’ on a range of matters pertaining to school openings that year. By the end of July 1970, the South Carolina committee was universally recognised as the pre-eminent SAC in the South. *The Palmetto Post*, an African-American newspaper based in Columbia, observed that out of all the Deep South SACs, ‘only the South Carolina Committee has systematically campaigned for public schools and racial peace during the transition.’⁶⁴

⁶² Minutes and attendance lists at the four meetings contained in ‘Agnew Committee (February – November, 1970)’.

⁶³ Ibid; Interview with Robert S. Davis (September 25, 1979), Interview 1/12/1, Governor Robert McNair Oral History Project, p. 22.

⁶⁴ Minutes and attendance lists at the four meetings contained in ‘Agnew Committee (February - November, 1970)’; B.J. Richey, ‘S.C. Citizen Panel Adopts "Soft-Sell" for School Peace, *The Long Island Press*; ‘September Songs for Dual Schools’, *The Ripon Forum* (October 1970), p. 19; Telephone conversation between Elliot Richardson & James H.

The happy confluence of a committee dedicated to a worthy goal and a state media only too willing to play its part was perhaps best expressed in the recording and dissemination of public advertisements promoting popular support for public education. The South Carolina SAC had demanded a ‘statewide saturation spot campaign on television and radio,’ and it was greatly aided in this endeavour by the aforementioned newspapers and television networks. On receiving the committee-sponsored advertisement, the Program Director of WJBF Channel 6 wrote to Russell Mellette, the SAC’s executive director, to assure him that the video tapes he sent would receive ‘extensive exposure on this station throughout the month of September.’ Even more impressively, James Yaeger, the General Manager of WIS-TV, produced spot announcements for the committee with little notice and at only nominal cost.

When the South Carolina SAC and the WIS-TV management reviewed the recorded spots, it was decided that difficulties of length, lack of local identity and an absence of black participants precluded their airing. As a result, the WIS-TV production team spent a whole night quickly editing a new set of commercials that featured ‘black and white children, entering school, happy faces, classroom scenes, playground activities, etc.’ On August 26, the SAC approved five ten-second colour television spots with the message ‘Is there anything more important than their education? Support your Public Schools.’ Whilst the other State Advisory Committees relied on television spots recorded by Billy Graham, the South Carolina SAC was able to broadcast its own, state-specific advertisements appealing for calm at the beginning of the 1970-71 school year. Even the state Highway Patrol played their role in ensuring that these adverts received sufficient air-time: relaying the tapes to television stations across South Carolina.⁶⁵

Why was the South Carolina committee so exceptionally committed and effective? Put simply, the state

Wilson (July 25, 1970), ‘Telecons – July 1970’, Box 127, Richardson Papers, Library of Congress; ‘Showing the Way,’ *The Palmetto Post* (September 3, 1970).

⁶⁵ Paul Wesley McNeill, ‘School desegregation in South Carolina, 1963-70’, PhD Thesis, University of Kentucky (1979), pp. 152 & 198-207; Robert Mardian to Spiro Agnew, ‘Weekly Activity Report’ (September 18, 1970), ‘Cabinet Committee on Education’, Box 3, Finch Files.

establishment felt genuinely comfortable with exerting top-down leadership in a way that civic leaders across other Deep South states often did not. The idea that Robert Davis would renege on his responsibilities as SAC chairman to abscond on safari was simply untenable. Most importantly, South Carolina had a decade-long tradition of biracial cooperation that simply did not exist in other Deep South states. Undoubtedly, this relationship was both unequal and prompted by white elites as a convenient way to diffuse racial conflict rather than advance black civil rights. Yet this recent history of cooperation ensured that, at the very least, South Carolinian elites were used to working with their African-American counterparts.

Last Ditch Defiance in the South Carolina Republican Party

By contrast, Strom Thurmond was considered by John Cauthen as 'not representative of the course of government within the state for the past two decades.' Reactionary politics still pervaded South Carolina, but by the turn of the decade had found an ideological home in the state Republican Party. On August 12, 1970, U.S. District Judge Robert Hemphill used a footnote in a court order desegregating Calhoun County schools to lambast the 'stench of political hypocrisy' emanating from those who had sought representative office through insisting on the 'resurrection of freedom of choice.' The impression that Hemphill aimed his comments at recent Republican campaigns seemed justified; particularly when Thurmond used *The State* newspaper to return fire at the judge, whom the rambunctious Senator contended had 'fallen victim to the loud cries of civil rights zealots who advocate a total and complete forced mixing of the races.'⁶⁶

Hemphill's judicial rebuke addressed itself directly to moderate South Carolinians' discomfort with the rabble-rousing gubernatorial campaign of Albert Watson, Strom Thurmond's protégé. Robert Davis shared the judge's distaste for such irresponsible politicking. Anticipating that the forthcoming gubernatorial election could potentially derail plans for peaceful school integration, Davis had appealed to all candidates to simply ignore the issue during campaigning. John West, the Democratic nominee, welcomed Davis' appeal

⁶⁶ Neal Pearce, *The Deep South States of America* (W.W. Norton, 1974), p. 394; Ginny Carroll, 'Judge Slaps Politicians In Mix Order,' *The State* (August 13, 1970) & Lee Bandy, 'Sen. Thurmond Hits Judges' Decisions', *The State* (August 15, 1970): both in 'South Carolina News Clippings', Box 5, Cabinet Committee on Education Files.

and pledged his cooperation. In stark contrast, Albert Watson refused to do so, contending that ‘all candidates should address themselves to the issues regardless of the controversial nature.’

Davis was less than impressed with Watson’s stance. Addressing a meeting of state school superintendents well-attended by the state media, the South Carolina committee chairman pointedly warned that South Carolina voters would look ‘with disfavour’ on those who sought to manipulate the current school desegregation issue ‘purely for selfish or political gain.’ The *Florence Morning News* applauded Davis’ stance in an editorial entitled ‘When An Issue Is Not An Issue,’ that evinced profound discomfort with the Republican candidate’s political style. ‘If [Watson’s] address is a sample of how he proposed to treat the subject,’ the newspaper advised, ‘he’d be wise to leave it unsaid.’ The South Carolina educational establishment treated the Republican nominee’s statements with similar distaste. At a conference of state school superintendents at Myrtle Beach in the fall of 1970, a resolution was passed criticising the negative impact of Watson’s reckless rhetoric.⁶⁷

Albert Watson’s political personality was defined by his stump speaking. As a youth he had won numerous national prizes for his debating skills. On hearing that Watson was likely to win the Republican gubernatorial nomination, one correspondent advised John West to exploit the widespread impression ‘that [Watson is] a windbag who talks a lot but does nothing.’ Over the course of his four terms in the state House of Representatives between 1955 and 1962, Watson had introduced and passed only two pieces of legislation: a bill removing the twenty-five cent fee charged for new vehicle registration card in the case of a change in name or address, and another making it unlawful to attempt or commit robbery upon ‘operators of certain motor vehicles.’ Neither were exactly landmark statutes.

Instead, Watson attracted infamy during his first year in the House for attempting to ban a children’s book

⁶⁷ ‘Committee Hits "Political Gain" From Mixing’, *Columbia Record* (August 13, 1970), ‘South Carolina News Clippings’, Box 5, Cabinet Committee on Education Files; ‘When an Issue Is Not an Issue’, *Florence Morning News* (August 9, 1970), ‘South Carolina - SAC – Robert Davis’, Box 12, Cabinet Committee on Education Files; Edward A. Eaddy to John West (November 2, 1970), ‘West, Personal, Camp., 1970, West Gub.l., Gen., 1970, Nov.’, Box 16, West Papers.

from South Carolina public libraries. Entitled *The Swimming Hole*, this title aimed at eight-to-twelve year olds involved scenes of black and white children playing in a swimming hole together; ending with the straightforward moral that ‘it doesn’t matter what color people are.’ As testament to the feverish political climate that gripped the state into a frenzy during 1956, Watson did manage to gain support for a measure subsequently described by one historian of the state’s response to the *Brown v. Board* decision as ‘one of the least laudable and, in truth, one of the most farcical of the legislature’s actions.’ Still, the moral tawdriness of Watson’s actions was recognised by cries from the House floor of ‘bookburning’ and ‘Hitler tactics.’⁶⁸

Despite such criticism, during the 1960s Watson deployed these demagogic tactics to outstanding electoral success. His 1965 congressional race against Democrat Preston Callison was a case in point. After losing Democratic seniority for supporting Barry Goldwater against Lyndon Johnson in the 1964 presidential election, Watson resigned his seat and ran again as a Republican; travelling a path pursued by Strom Thurmond barely a year earlier. Like Thurmond, Watson did not need to change his campaign tactics. On May 26, 1965, the Republican candidate publicly stated that he refused to solicit the support of blacks until ‘they started voting as independents instead of as a block.’ It was not the last time that Watson would deploy such race-baiting rhetoric. Tapping into a line propounded by Senator Thurmond, that South Carolina Republicans favoured ‘the rights of all citizens – black and white – with preference to none,’ Watson also called for a repeal of civil rights legislation that he insisted had precipitated ‘confusion, unrest, and even violence.’ Unsurprisingly, Watson was supported by a local racist organisation responsible for pamphlets headlined ‘The South Is Under Attack,’ and ‘The Whites Must Stick Together.’

Campaigning against black voting power and civil rights laws proved a potent concoction in mid-1960s South Carolina, and Watson captured nearly seventy percent of the vote. He received virtually no black

⁶⁸ R.K. Wise to John West (February 16, 1970), ‘West, Personal, Camp., 1970, West Gub.l., Organization, Strategy, 1969-1970, June’, Box 19, West Papers; James M. Tobras to John West (23 February, 1970), ‘West, Clippings, 1969-1970, Campaign, Persons, Watson, Albert’, Box 40, West Papers; Mack Flaming to John West (July 20, 1970), ‘West, Personal, Camp., 1970, West Gubernatorial, Topical, Persons, Watson, Albert (1 of 2)’, Box 20, West Papers; Idus A. Newby, ‘South Carolina and the Desegregation Issue: 1954-1956’ (Master’s Thesis, Georgia Teachers College, 1957), pp. 217-19.

support. In Columbia's 9th Ward, which was almost totally African-American, Watson received 27 votes to his opponent's 1,258. Watson's politics relied on a very public repudiation of full black participation in civil society. A few months after his re-election, Congressman Watson announced a probe of prominent civil rights groups 'to determine the extent to which they are influenced by or dominated by subversive elements.' Watson's segregationist theatrics continued unbroken through the 1970 gubernatorial campaign.⁶⁹

Balancing Politics and Principle: the Gubernatorial Campaign of John West

Whilst an influential coterie of Republicans sought to build its party on the grandstanding electioneering of Massive Resistance, the Democratic Party aimed to consolidate its dominance through the politics of pluralism. In contrast to a virtually lilywhite Republican event, the state Democratic conference boasted a substantial African-American presence. Out of a turnout of one thousand Democrats, around two hundred were African American, with three taking their seats on the executive committee; one as the first black vice-chairman in party history. At the doorway to the convention hall, young African-American women handed delegates campaign leaflets. Marion Gressette, the state Senator from Calhoun County who had spearheaded a legislative committee designed to thwart *Brown*, now sat with his integrated county delegation.⁷⁰

John West was a flag-bearer of the Democrats' shift in political culture. As a state senator in the 1950s, the Ku Klux Klan attacked West's moderation to the point that he carried a pistol on his person for three years. Such was the Lieutenant Governor's reputation amongst black voters that West trounced Lester Bates, the moderate three-term Mayor of Columbia, in a December 1969 poll amongst black respondents by thirty-six points to twelve. Perhaps the most impressive testimony to John West's racial tolerance was a speech he gave

⁶⁹ 'House Dixiecrats Stripped of Seniority', *Washington Post* (January 3, 1965); Mack Flaming to John West (July 20, 1970); Julia Duscher, 'Watson, Invoking Strom and Barry, Is Favored', *Washington Post* (June 6, 1965); 'Watson Will Seek Probe Of Civil Rights Groups', *Washington Post* (August 16, 1965); 'Political Notes: South Carolina Special Election,' *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Record* (1965), p. 1185.

⁷⁰ Jack Bass, 'Albert Watson Has Unified S.C. Democrats', *Charlotte Observer* (March 29, 1970); Jack Bass & W. Scott Poole, *The Palmetto State* (University of South Carolina Press, 2009), pp. 84 & 128.

in Manning at a dinner for Roy Wilkins, Executive Director of the NAACP, held on November 1, 1968. The rather unlikely friendship between a senior white South Carolina Democrat and a prominent national civil rights activist was forged in the fraught aftermath of the Orangeburg Massacre eight months earlier.

Speaking at Orangeburg on February 25, 1968, Roy Wilkins had proved an unexpected ally in West's quest to defuse the social discord that followed those tragic events. Denouncing violence in pursuit of any cause, Wilkins' presence and mollifying rhetoric 'did much,' in the words of West, 'to relieve the tensions which existed [in Orangeburg]' at that time. Acknowledging the plain fact that such a bi-racial gathering would have been impossible just five or ten years earlier, West graciously paid tribute to 'the responsible leaders of both the black and white races' who had patiently worked towards such mutual tolerance. Still, in a rather sad postscript, West concluded that even in 1968, 'extremists of both races may condemn us for participating in such a gathering.'⁷¹

South Carolina Republicans would certainly not forget West's participation that evening. In mid-October 1970, a month before the gubernatorial election, an anonymous flier was distributed throughout the state attacking the Democratic candidate. Entitled 'Fact Sheet: Humphrey, Wilkins, and West,' the leaflet recalled West's toast to Roy Wilkins two years earlier: criticising Wilkins' NAACP as a group that 'more than any other is responsible for the destruction of freedom of choice in our public schools.' Although he put forward no direct proof, West firmly believed that it was distributed by James Edwards, a Charleston Republican who would later become the state's first Republican Governor since Reconstruction. In fact, the question of Edwards' guilt mattered little. Whoever bore responsibility, the leaflet's contents made clear that West's racial moderation was seen by some South Carolinians as a supreme weakness for a state-wide candidate seeking office during such racially-polarised times.⁷²

⁷¹ Oral history interview with John West conducted by Herb Hartsook, Columbia, S.C. (February 1, 1996 & July 10, 1997), p. 45; 'A Study of Attitudes of Voters in South Carolina' (December 1969), 'Camp., 1970, West Gubernatorial, Topical, South Carolina Voter Attitudes, June & Sept. 1970', Box 20, West Papers, p. 10; John V. O'Neill, 'NAACP Executive Director Praised At Dinner', *The State* (November 2, 1968).

⁷² John West to William Workman (October 16, 1970), '1970, Elections, South Carolina, Governor / Lt. Governor', Box 8, Workman Papers; Press release by John West campaign (October 14, 1970), 'West, Personal, Camp.,

A majority of John West's close supporters held similar views, and worried that a toxic combination of disrupted school openings and Watson's talent for exploiting racial tensions would torpedo the Lieutenant Governor's chances. In mid-February 1970, R.K. Wise, onetime advisor to South Carolina Governor and U.S. Senator Olin Johnston, warned West that his prospective opponent, 'is going to try to use the school issue to beat you. If our people in South Carolina are up in a commotion this coming September, you might be in a little trouble.' West's campaign advisors evinced similar concerns. Poll data from December 1969 demonstrated that the question of school integration was at the forefront of South Carolina voters' concerns. The mid-year school desegregation decrees handed down in late January 1970, followed by the Lamar disturbance six weeks later, further 'stirred the emotions and resentments of the whites of South Carolina against public school desegregation and gives...an indication of what to expect in September.'⁷³

The prospects for peaceful school openings at the beginning of the 1970-71 academic year seemed grim. For a start, during the 1969-1970 year the vast majority of potentially-troublesome districts had only operated under token desegregation plans. One of the only majority-black school districts to be desegregated during the 1969-1970 school year, Darlington County, was the scene of the Lamar bus riot. Instructively, Lamar High School's black enrolment had exploded from a handful of pupils to three-hundred just weeks before trouble began. Federal officials instinctively understood the potential for crises in newly-integrated black-belt school districts. As a matter of policy, in the late 1960s HEW had focussed their attention on southern school districts with a minority of black students. In November 1967, a strategy memo from HEW's Office for Civil Rights explained that Title VI enforcement would focus on school districts with 'less than 50% Negro student enrolment.' By contrast, majority-black school districts would merely be offered the option of educational assistance from the Title IV unit.

1970, West Gub.l., Press Releases, 1970, Issued by West, Oct 1-15', Box 19, West Papers.

⁷³ R.K. Wise to John West (February 16, 1970; 'A Study of Attitudes of Voters in South Carolina (December 1969)', p. 25; Unsigned memo, 'Desegregation in South Carolina, (March 19, 1970), 'West, Personal, Camp., 1970, West Gubernatorial, Topical, School Desegregation', Box 20, West Papers.

This policy of addressing less flammable situations ensured that encouraging desegregation statistics released in the fall of 1969 did not adequately reflect the difficulty of the task to come. In early November 1969, Leon Panetta, head of OCR, reported that the hundred-odd southern school districts remaining deadlocked in negotiation with HEW, having been granted reprieve from compliance ‘year after year,’ all had a majority of black pupils. The eight recalcitrant South Carolina districts ordered later that month to present a desegregation plan by the end of the calendar year were all majority black. By contrast, just a few months later HEW’s south-eastern regional office in Atlanta reported that the South Carolina schools ‘where transition [to a unitary system] has been relatively smooth’ all had less than thirty-percent black representation in the student body. The trend was foreboding. Given that thirty-seven majority black school districts existed across the state of South Carolina, the bulk of which were slated for total integration at the beginning of the 1970-71 school year, the prospects for racial tensions running high around election day appeared substantial.⁷⁴

The temptation to capitalise on a Republican administration's enforcement of desegregation mandates was tantalising. In Georgia, Jimmy Carter’s successful gubernatorial campaign that year relied on race-baiting Carl Sanders, a progressive former Governor, in the Democratic primary race. Carter’s campaign operation included a ‘stink tank’ that distributed a photograph of Sanders celebrating with black NBA basketball players after a game in Atlanta to small-town barbershops, rural churches, and service stations. Copies were even handed out at Ku Klux Klan rallies. So ashamed was Carter of such tactics that after the primary he immediately telephoned Sanders to personally apologise, and privately prayed for forgiveness.⁷⁵

Given that the racial demographics of South Carolina bore far more similarity to Georgia than Arkansas or

⁷⁴ Telex: Bill Hughes to Goldman, ‘Lamar Incident’ (March 5, 1970), Folder 8, Box 8, *Newsweek* Atlanta Bureau Records; Ruby Martin to many, ‘Elementary and Secondary School Desegregation Program -- The Coming Year’ (November 8, 1967), ‘Ed: Desegregation: U.S. Dep’t of Health, Education & Welfare: Office of Civil Rights, 1966 - 1972 (1 of 2)’, Box 12, Mizell Papers; Leon Panetta to Robert Finch, ‘Recommended Title VI Actions in Response to Supreme Court decision’ (November 3, 1969) & Lamar Clements to Dewey Dodds, ‘100% desegregated South Carolina districts where transition has been relatively smooth’ (February 25, 1970): both in ‘Desegregation - Title VI Compliance (CFOA 5019)’, Box 81, Garment Files; Hastings Wyman to Pat Gray (November 21, 1969), ‘Civil Rights: 1969, November 13-30’, Box 3, Personal, Finch Papers.

⁷⁵ Randy Sanders, *Mighty Peculiar Elections* (Louisiana State University Press, 2007), pp. 161-8.

Florida, where more moderate campaigns prevailed, the pressure on West to indulge in such tactics was immense. The Lieutenant Governor's political advisors repeatedly advised that West make 'political hay...of people's just hopes' for a reprieve from school integration. When Crawford Cook, a prominent South Carolina political consultant, reviewed John West's campaign in late March 1970 he insisted that the racial integration of state public schools could prove decisive. 'God help us in November,' Cook complained with justifiable concern, 'but for now we seem saddled with our predetermined decision to ignore the issue publicly.' Divisions on how far to push the racial issue nearly tore the West campaign team apart. On March 19, 1970, West's campaign consultant, Crawford Cook, produced a report subtitled, 'How can the desegregation issue work for John West?' So inflammatory was the premise of this report that it precipitated 'three days and nights of the most intensive discussion, debate and often violent disagreement' that even this veteran politician had ever witnessed. Nevertheless, these prolonged debates produced no concrete result, and left West's position on the racial question poorly defined.⁷⁶

As the months passed, and school openings loomed ever closer, West's moderate stance appeared increasingly untenable. A June 1970 state-wide poll closely studied by the West team demonstrated that white South Carolina was growing increasingly antagonistic towards the arrival of integrated schools that fall. At the turn of the year, twenty-eight percent of white respondents considered racial issues the leading state-wide concern, and eleven percent specifically alluded to school integration. By June 1970, these numbers had shot up by nine and seventeen points respectively. The danger for West was that his unconvincing stand on the school issue threatened to render his candidacy an irrelevance.

As John West's profile grew in South Carolina, he was increasingly perceived as the weak candidate. Experience aside, the poll reported that amongst white voters, 'Watson outdoes West – particularly in the

⁷⁶ Unsigned memo, 'Desegregation in South Carolina, (March 19, 1970); Crawford Cook to John West (March 24, 1970), 'West, Personal, Camp., 1970, West Gub.l., Organization, Strategy, 1969-1970', Box 19, West Papers; Draft Statement & 'Statement of Lt. Gov. John C. West' (March 24, 1970): both in 'West, Personal, Camp., 1970, West Gub.l., Press Releases, 1970, Issued by West, Feb-June', Box 19, West Papers.

areas of being independent-outspoken-a fighter, and personality.’ Albert Watson’s close relationship with a national Administration responsible for enforcing these grossly unpopular school mandates did not seem to negatively impact on the Republican candidate’s campaign. In a list of the nine most prominent criticisms of Watson, this particular issue did not appear at all.⁷⁷

Ironically, the Republican candidate’s chances of success appeared largely contingent on his ability to disassociate himself from an increasingly unpopular White House. Two years earlier, southern GOP leaders agreed to support Richard Nixon in part because his successful candidacy presented an opportunity to grow the party across the South. By the midsummer of 1970, no less a Nixon loyalist than Strom Thurmond publicly warned the United States President away from campaigning in South Carolina lest he derail Watson’s candidacy for Governor. Instead, Thurmond sought the endorsement of California’s hardline Governor Ronald Reagan to buttress his protégé’s campaign.⁷⁸

As usual, Thurmond’s political antenna was remarkably accurate. A South Carolina poll taken in September 1970 reported that Nixon’s political fortunes had nosedived from ‘extremely popular’ in November 1969 to ‘below the minimum desirable level’ for an incumbent, measured as a two-to-one favourable to unfavourable ratio. By contrast, Strom Thurmond’s poll ratings had actually improved over the course of the previous ten months. Publicly disassociating himself from the Nixon Administration’s ‘vindictive’ and ‘anti-South’ school policies had proven a politically astute manoeuvre. The question was whether Albert Watson could shrug off association with a President whom South Carolina Democrats believed was an ‘albatross’ around the

⁷⁷ Poll conducted by John F. Kraft, Inc. ‘A Study of Attitudes of Voters in South Carolina’ (December 1969), ‘West, Personal, Camp., 1970, West Gubernatorial, Topical, South Carolina Voter Attitudes, December 1969’, Box 20, West Papers, p. 36; Poll conducted by John F. Kraft, Inc. ‘A Study of Attitudes of Voters in South Carolina’ (June 1970), pp. 26, 27 & 44.

⁷⁸ Gregg Herrington, ‘Thurmond Sees Nixon Losing Favor in South’, *Washington Post* (July 26, 1970); D.J. Carrison to Harry Dent (August 19, 1970), ‘South Carolina Politics’ (January - December, 1970), Folder 207, Box 6, Dent Papers.

Republican candidate's neck.⁷⁹

In early July 1970, the more conservative members of John West's campaign team sensed an opportunity to capitalise on Watson's association with the Nixon Administration and bolster the Democratic candidate's standing amongst right-of-centre voters. Not only did the Justice Department file ten suits against South Carolina school districts, but HEW began to publicly question the legitimacy of South Carolina State College's all-black student body. By tacking to the right on the racial issue, John West's campaign team also sought to avoid the fate of Alabama Governor Albert Brewer, who had narrowly lost to George Wallace in the Democratic gubernatorial primary earlier that spring. Aware that the incumbent was associated with black causes, Wallace had claimed that African-Americans would 'control the state' in the event of Brewer's re-election. By adopting a hard-line stand on schools, West attempted to avoid Brewer's fate.⁸⁰

A public statement denounced federal intervention in the state's public school system. 'South Carolina is going to fight,' it announced in the opening sentence; a stark contrast to Governor McNair's earlier commitment to peacefully complying with school mandates once legal resistance had 'run out of courts.' West's statement seven months later appealed to a different tradition, and recalled a more defiant chief executive. 'Starting with Governor Byrnes, 16 years ago, the State of South Carolina has defended by every legal means the integrity of our public schools,' West thundered in uncharacteristically combative language, 'We will continue to do so...We will fight without further hope or expectation of outside hope or sympathy.' The appeal to judicial appeals destined to fail, allied with a sense of Lost Cause martyrdom, was redolent of the types of statements released by segregationist politicians across the Deep South that year; not least Albert

⁷⁹ Poll conducted by John F. Kraft, Inc. 'A Study of South Carolina Voter Attitudes Towards 1970 Contest for Governor' (September 1970), 'Personal, Camp., 1970, West Gubernatorial, Topical, South Carolina Voter Attitudes, June & Sept. 1970', Box 20, West Papers, p. 4; Ike McLeese to John West (c. August 1970). Dent was so concerned with Nixon's image in the South that he warned H.R. Haldeman that 'The President should not go into South Carolina.': See Harry Dent to H.R. Haldeman (October 5, 1970), '1970 Politics (#3) B (1 of 2)', Box 10, Dent Files.

⁸⁰ Kenneth Reich, 'Styles Contrast for Candidates in S. Carolina', *Los Angeles Times* (October 11, 1970); Oral history interview with John West conducted by Herb Hartsook, Columbia, S.C. (February 1, 1996 & July 10, 1997), p. 43.

Watson. In short, these press releases represented a repudiation of McNair's stand earlier that year: kowtowing to the type of reactionary opinion that insisted the Governor wave an axe-handle around and curse the Supreme Court.⁸¹

Progressive South Carolinians were appalled. One Methodist minister wrote to complain that 'such a statement is too similar to statements by Albert Watson last year at [Lamar] which contributed to the tragedy there.' The Christian Action Council, an ecumenical alliance of state churches committed to racial integration, was similarly bemused. 'Is this a true quote?' demanded the Council's president in horrified tones, 'It does sound like Albert Watson, doesn't it.' West's close political allies were as concerned about this new campaign strategy, albeit more aware of the electoral exigencies involved. One contemptuously denounced the upset of 'pseudo-liberals and quasi intellectuals' with the Lieutenant Governor's hard-line stance, but nevertheless advised that having 'established our position' on the school issue the campaign 'should cool it' lest risk alienating the moderate voters who constituted West's natural constituency. Fred Sheheen, publisher of the *Camden Chronicle*, West's hometown newspaper and one of the Lieutenant Governor's business ventures, grounded his thoughts in hard statistics. Poring over a campaign poll from June 1970, Sheheen reported the simple truth that West could not overcome his Republican opponent's lead amongst white South Carolinians without effectively mobilising the black vote. ⁸²

Years later, John West presented the moment he reached a 'breaking point' with this brief indulgence in racial politicking as a time of moral decisiveness. In mid-July 1970, the Lieutenant Governor received a visit from Clarence Ford: his business partner, mentor, and chief fundraiser. Musing on West's recent statements, Ford observed simply that, 'John, this doesn't sound like you.' When West replied that he was unhappy with

⁸¹ Public statement by John West (July 10, 1970), 'Personal, Camp., 1970, West Gub.I., Press Releases, 1970, Issued by West, July', Box 19, West Papers.

⁸² W.F. Harris to John West (11 July, 1970) & John West to Joseph T. Stukes (President of Christian Action Council) (20 July 1970), 'West, Personal, Camp., 1970, West Gubernatorial, Topical, School Desegregation', Box 20, West Papers; Ike McLeese to John West (c. August 1970); Fred R. Sheheen to John West (July 28, 1970), 'West, Personal, Camp., 1970, West Gub.I., Organization, Strategy, 1970, July-Oct', Box 19, West Papers.

participating in such murky politicking, Ford colourfully advised, 'Damn it, if you ain't comfortable, don't do it. It ain't worth sacrificing your character.'⁸³

Satisfied that 'there are worse things than losing,' West decided to follow Ford's advice. Writing to Crawford Cook, the key exponent of an aggressively conservative attack amongst his campaign team, West justified and outlined a new course of moderation. 'As you have undoubtedly sensed,' he carefully explained, 'I have been concerned in the last ten days about the course of the campaign, and especially the role which political necessities seem to have dictated I take.' Accordingly, West insisted that he could no longer 'project the image of a die-hard segregationist who will "require federal marshals and court orders."' Instead, the Lieutenant Governor demanded that his campaign be constructed around a 'positive program' and the solid, if unambitious, theme of 'let's build South Carolina with a South Carolinian who has worked to do so and who is interested only in South Carolina.' As a consequence, criticism of the Republican party would be limited to the issue of broken promises on textiles alone. No longer would the Lieutenant Governor lambast the Nixon Administration for interfering in South Carolina schools. 84

On July 24, 1970, Crawford Cook wrote to Democratic county leaders to clarify the 'confusion' that existed about West's position on 'integration efforts aimed at the public schools and institutions of higher learning in the state.' So delicate was this process that Cook's draft was covered in corrections written in blue and black ink. In the wake of the memo, West's campaign did assume a far more progressive tone. On July 21, 1970, the candidate told the Charleston Optimistic Club that 'a political campaign can - and should - be constructive, not divisive.' Accordingly, West committed to a self-imposed ethical code of avoiding 'mud-slinging and name-calling.'⁸⁵

⁸³ Oral history interview with John West (February 1, 1996 & July 10, 1997), p. 43.

⁸⁴ John West to Crawford Cook (July 17, 1970), 'West, Personal, Camp., 1970, West Gub.l., Organization, Strategy, 1970, July-Oct', Box 19, West Papers.

⁸⁵ Crawford Cook to County Leaders, 'The John West Campaign' (July 24, 1970), 'West, Personal, Camp., 1970, West Gubernatorial, Topical, School Desegregation', Box 20, West Papers.

Campaign literature reflected these commitments. Democratic advertisements excoriating the Nixon Administration's broken promises focused exclusively on textiles, economic issues and federal spending. Despite the array of Republican campaign pledges on 'freedom of choice' two years earlier, the issue of schools was completely excluded from such commercials. Campaign literature urged South Carolina voters to 'Elect A Good Man Governor,' and to 'Judge what a man will do...by what he has done' alongside a list of West's record as a community leader, state senator and Lieutenant Governor. In reference to Watson's proclivity for controversy, campaign leaflets also described the Democrat's record as '16 years of seeking results and not headlines.'

A renewed sense of self-purpose infused John West's correspondence. Writing to the editor of the *Baptist Courier* in Greenville, West could now confidently assert that, 'My lifetime record of support of the public school system is well known...I have never used our children, our teachers, and our school administrators as political pawns, nor will I ever disrupt the orderly educational processes through inflammatory speeches or statements.' No longer would progressive South Carolina feel betrayed by the Democratic candidate's public statements.⁸⁶

The Lieutenant Governor clearly realised that there simply was no future in the type of hard-line rhetoric offered up to the electorate by Watson. As McNair astutely observed after receiving criticism for his speech urging peaceful compliance with desegregation mandates, the short-term popularity of defiance would eventually be outweighed by the longer-term consequences of such a futile position. By focusing on the less explosive issue of textile import quotas to illustrate the Nixon Administration's broken promises, West forfeited segregationist votes but could wholeheartedly commit himself to a more comfortable position 'that children attending public schools will do so in complete safety.' Instead of desperately appearing to fulfil campaign pledges he had no power to implement, a West governorship could build on his predecessor's legacy in education of teacher pay rises, lower student-teacher ratios, and a state-wide public kindergarten

⁸⁶ Undated audio recording produced by Cook/Ruef & Associates, 'South Carolina Democratic Party (West & Morris): Cuts 1 & 2 - Thurmond's Political Talk', Box 36, West Papers; John West campaign leaflet (c. 1970), 'West, Personal, Camp., 1970, West Gub.l., Gen., 1970, Dec . and c. 1970' & John West to John E. Roberts (October 19, 1970), 'Personal, Camp., 1970, West Gub.l., Gen., 1970, October 16-31': both in Box 16, West Papers.

program. The Lieutenant Governor now renewed the promise he made when announcing his candidacy on February 23, 1970: 'The lives and future of our children are far too important to be used as political footballs.'⁸⁷

Still, West's decision was not taken in an electoral vacuum. South Carolina Republicans were absolutely right to argue that 'there isn't a Democratic office holder in the state, who, having faced serious Republican opposition, doesn't owe his political life to the Negro bloc vote.' West certainly could not be elected with white votes alone. The question was whether black voters would carry on tolerating insensitive campaigning by Democratic candidates as the price of having their candidate assume power in such a racially conservative state. In his controversial March 19 memo, Crawford Cook had assumed that 'strong anti-court and H.E.W. stands by John West would not alienate a single Negro voter because they realize their only hope for representation is in the party of the people.' Cook's assumption reflected a longstanding tradition in South Carolina whereby Democratic politicians would court enfranchised African-Americans 'like a gentleman who maintains a paramour on a back alley and goes to see her at night.'⁸⁸

As black South Carolina grew more politically assertive, so this tradition came under fire. In June 1970, rumours circulated that black community leaders in Richland County had urged Democratic leaders to endorse local black candidates lest 'the black community [go] fishing in November and Albert Watson be elected Governor.' A month later, similar militancy coalesced amongst black South Carolinians in response to West's comments about the prospect of integrated state education. According to Isaac Williams, Newman's successor as NAACP state field director, the Lieutenant Governor had 'torn his pants' with black voters by pandering to reactionary white opinion. In early August, Williams listed six demands that gubernatorial candidates seeking the African-American vote would have to pursue, and even suggested that black South

⁸⁷ Levona Page, 'Reason To Smile: McNair's Program Clears Hurdle', *The State and Columbia Record* (June 22, 1969), "General, 1969", Box 106, McNair Papers; Randy Sanders, *Mighty Peculiar Elections*, p. 122.

⁸⁸ Statement by Ray Harris (July 28, 1970), 'West, Personal, Camp., 1970, West Gubernatorial, Topical, Republican Party', Box 20, West Papers; 'Desegregation in South Carolina, (March 19, 1970); 'Weep no more, Columbia: The South Into a New Century', Reprint from Newsweek (May 3, 1965), 'Projects, Cola. Community Relations Council, Race Relations, Gen.', Box 1, Bates Papers.

Carolinians might boycott the voting booths in November if these conditions were not met. Unsurprisingly, West joined his Republican opponent in refusing to be held hostage. Nevertheless, the West campaign began to seriously fret about the possibility of Williams' threat becoming a reality in November.⁸⁹

The most obvious concern was the formation of the United Citizens Party (UCP). Begun in protest at the absence of a strong African-American voice in state politics, the UCP intended to provide an alternative to Democratic domination of black ballots in South Carolina. The letter announcing the UCP's formation in the spring of 1970 cited the Orangeburg Massacre, unspecified 'repression' of minority communities by state Democrats and inequitable voting practices as evidence that such a party was necessary. The UCP candidate for Governor, Thomas Broadwater, had achieved state-wide notoriety as a defence lawyer in freedom-of-speech cases across the Columbia metropolitan area during the previous year. On top of bitter criticism of Albert Watson's 'appeal to the brutality of those who would overturn school buses and physically harm little school children,' Broadwater mimicked Isaac Williams' line of attack against John West. If black South Carolinians could not rely on either Watson or A.W. Bethea, then neither could they 'turn to a candidate who's too busy trying to get state funds to fight school desegregation and quality education.'⁹⁰

UCP campaigning destabilised John West's vote amongst his African-American base. On October 1, 1970, the West campaign took delivery of the latest campaign poll. The results were striking. According to the report, 'the introduction of a "Fourth Party" candidate has had a profound effect on [voting] preferences.' Whilst black voters had not flocked *en masse* to the UCP, their committed support for West had dropped by thirty-three points since June: from seventy percent to just thirty-seven. Over the same period, undecided voters amongst the black community had risen by roughly the same interval: from twenty-eight to fifty-seven

⁸⁹ Ken Powell, 'News Release' (June 23, 1970), 'Powell, C. Kenneth, Papers, 1970', Box 1, Powell Papers; Randy Sanders, *Mighty Peculiar Elections*, p. 134; 'Politicians Enjoy Games Awaiting School Openings,' *Greenville Piedmont* (August 3, 1970), 'South Carolina News Clippings', Box 5, Cabinet School Committee Files.

⁹⁰ Rosetta E. Ross, 'The Life and Work of Victoria W. DeLee: A Study of Transformative Ethical Practice (Master's Thesis, Emory University, May 4, 1995), pp. 221-2; 'UCP Opens Drive', *Palmetto Post* (September 12, 1970).

percent. Whilst the report concluded that ‘the battle still lies ahead,’ it also underlined the stark fact that Broadwater’s candidacy ‘has introduced a disruptive element’ to John West’s natural electoral base.⁹¹

Riding Racism to the State House

Such complexities did not bother the South Carolina GOP. Across the South, declaiming the ‘bloc vote’ was proving an effective means of building up white support for the Republican Party. One study of GOP growth in the South between 1960 and 2000 found that ‘the racial composition of state’s electorate is directly and positively associated with the rate of growth in the Republican Party.’ Southern Republicans continued to exploit this trend for maximum electoral reward into the 1970s. In the summer of 1970, Columbia Republicans accused African-American voters of chicanery. Ken Powell, the new county chairman, adopted a more aggressive stand than Duffy. One GOP flyer released in Columbia denounced the ‘infamous deal day’ of June 5, 1970, when black community leaders allegedly instructed their constituents who to vote for in the upcoming Democratic primary. Local Republicans espied a grand conspiracy against white Columbians. ‘It could mark the end to honest elections,’ warned the pamphlet, ‘Here is the where, when, who and how deal day started. Where will it end?’⁹²

In a state with a white population indoctrinated about the evils of ‘black’ Reconstruction at school, such open-ended questions cynically tapped into latent white fears of black racial domination. Albert Watson’s campaign deployed even less subtlety when exploiting this issue. In mid-September 1970, Watson released an advertisement that began with the Republican candidate asking, ‘Are we going to be ruled by the bloc? Look what it did in Watts...[and] in the nation’s capital.’ These words were followed by footage of black

⁹¹ ‘A Study of South Carolina Voter Attitudes’ (September 1970).

⁹² M.V. Hood, Quentin Kidd & Irwin L. Morris, ‘The Reintroduction of the *Elephas Maximus* to the Southern United States’, *American Politics Research* 32 (2004), p. 84; Ken Powell, ‘News Release’ (June 23, 1970) & Richland County GOP Flyer, ‘Deal Day: June 5, 1970 (c. June 1970): both in ‘Papers, 1970’, Powell Papers.

rioters attacking police, and concluded with Watson decrying his opposition as a 'radical minority who are trying to destroy this country.' The message was crystal clear. Dolly Hamby, who managed Watson's public-relations during the campaign but was not consulted before broadcast, later described them as 'the worst example of raw racism I have ever seen,' and consequently 'offensive to almost any decent person.'⁹³

Although immediately pulled after just one showing, the advertisement accrued widespread notoriety. In Albert Watson's 1994 obituary, the *New York Times* included this incident alongside the Lamar bus riot as evidence of the Republican's opposition to racial integration during the 1970 election. Despite claiming that he had not vetted the commercial before broadcast, Watson stood by its message in the face of widespread criticism. Shortly after the commercial's solitary airing, even Jim Henderson, GOP nominee for Lieutenant Governor, publicly criticised his running mate's views. 'If I get in there,' Henderson fumed at a campaign barbeque in Spartanburg, 'I tell you, we're going to have some blacks at our next state convention. If I have anything to do with it, we're going to pay attention to all the races. No party can hold public office without recognizing that one-third of South Carolina's population is black.' Henderson's comments dovetailed more with the pluralistic coalitions constructed in Arkansas and Virginia by Winthrop Rockefeller and Linwood Holton respectively than Albert Watson's Dixiecrat posturing.⁹⁴

Other prominent Republicans agreed. After viewing the footage, Cooper White, the Republican Mayor of Greenville, disavowed his party's gubernatorial candidate. Opining that the state GOP 'should be broad enough to encompass all persons no matter what race, creed or color,' White tactfully concluded that his racial views 'were not the same' as Albert Watson. When the Watson campaign arrived in Greenville, White

⁹³ 'Watson Playing Racist Game in Campaign', *Palmetto Post* (September 19, 1970); John W. White, 'Race, Grassroom Activism, and the Evolution of the Republican Right in South Carolina, 1952-1974' in *Painting Dixie Red*, edited by Glenn Feldman (University Press of Florida, 2011), p. 163. For an example of the politicisation of Reconstruction in the 1970 campaign, see Albert Watson's comparison of the state Democratic administration with 'the carpetbaggers and their radical cohorts': 'News from Watson for Governor' (July 16, 1970), 'West, Personal, Camp., 1970, West Gubernatorial, Topical, Persons, Watson, Albert (1 of 2)', Box 20, West Papers.

⁹⁴ 'Albert Watson, 72, Lawmaker; Opposed Integration of Schools', *New York Times* (September 27, 1994); Kenneth Reich, 'Styles Contrast for Candidates in South Carolina.

accrued state-wide attention by failing to greet the Republican gubernatorial nominee. Unsurprisingly, Democrats were blunter in their condemnation. John Hagins, the executive director of the state Democratic Party, described the commercial as a desperate attempt to ‘revive a sagging racially-orientated campaign.’

Watson’s response proved the validity of Hagins’ analysis. ‘If they’re calling me "racist",’ the Republican candidate shot back, ‘then they’re calling the majority of the people in this state "racist"...I’ll stand with the people.’ In the manner of a genuine demagogue, Watson now cast himself as the embodiment of the disregarded popular will. Like the white tie Watson wore to denote his racial ‘affiliation,’ this short commercial thrust the Republican’s campaign firmly into the same bracket as that of George Wallace, whose 1970 run for Alabama Governor included a television advertisement denouncing the ‘black block’ and a campaign poster that depicted an isolated white girl surrounded by young black men with the caption ‘Wake up Alabama!’⁹⁵

The Nixon White House's Janus-Faced Southern Approach

Albert Watson had metamorphosed into the Palmetto State’s very own George Wallace. Watson’s campaign even adopted Wallace’s slogan in the recent Alabama Democratic primary, ‘Our Kind of Man,’ to proclaim himself ‘Your Kind of Man.’ South Carolina segregationists certainly viewed Watson’s candidacy in this light. Despite Wallace’s American Independence Party putting up a third-party candidate in that year’s gubernatorial race, just a few weeks after Watson’s controversial television advertisement the 1968 George Wallace campaign leadership in South Carolina endorsed the Republican candidate. Wallace voters agreed with this stance. In a poll taken in mid-October 1970 of white voters, forty-one percent of voters who

⁹⁵ Joan McKinney, ‘GOP Leaders Polarize Races, Mayor Says’, *Greenville Piedmont* (September 19, 1970), ‘West, Clippings, 1969-1970, Campaign, Persons, Watson, Albert’, Box 40, West Papers; Jerry Mitchell, ‘GOP claims deal made for votes’, *Baltimore Afro-American* (August 8, 1970); Randy Sanders, *Mighty Peculiar Elections* (Louisiana State University Press, 2007), pp. 137-8; Jack Bass & Walter De Vries, *The Transformation of Southern Politics* (University of Georgia Press, 1976), p. 39; Phillip Rawls, ‘Book rates George Wallace’s ’70 campaign as the nastiest’, *The Decatur Daily* (March 5, 2006).

identified with Wallace's American Independence Party intended to cast their ballot for Albert Watson. By contrast, only eleven percent intended to vote for the party's official candidate in South Carolina. Watson also enjoyed a highly-committed following. Whereas only two-in-five West followers described themselves as 'very strong' for the Lieutenant Governor's candidacy, three-fifths of the Republican nominee's supporters identified themselves in this fashion. Albert Watson now represented the fervent politics of defiance in a way that Richard Nixon had not two years earlier.⁹⁶

Despite Albert Watson's indulgence in crude race-baiting, the Nixon White House continued to support its ally in South Carolina. When Vice President Spiro Agnew visited Greenville in October 1970, he denounced busing and charged 'flagrant and inexcusable bias against the South' on the part of unnamed northern aggressors. Even David Eisenhower, the President's son-in-law, headed down to South Carolina 'as a representative of the Nixon family' to praise the Republican candidate's strong stance on school discipline. All three of these positions reiterated Watson's basic campaign themes, albeit using language that could be defended back in Washington D.C. In the context of the President's commitment to the work of the State Advisory Committees, such strong support for a candidate whose electoral hopes rested on racial tension was anachronistic.

On July 23, 1970, the President thanked the South Carolina State Advisory Committee in person 'for its willingness to bring about compliance with the law as a matter of will, and not of necessity.' Nevertheless, Nixon continued to support a candidate whose electoral success was contingent on thwarting peaceful desegregation. Just a day before his meeting with the South Carolina SAC, the President told a group of White House political advisors that he was considering visiting the Palmetto State in support of the Republican's gubernatorial drive. Nixon also reiterated his intention of offering Watson an Administration appointment should he fail to overturn a century of Democratic dominance of the South Carolina Governor's

⁹⁶ Randy Sanders, *Mighty Peculiar Elections*, pp. 137-8 & 160; Central Surveys, Inc., 'Voter Opinion Survey: South Carolina, October 2-15, 1970' (c. October 1970), 'Politics (1970 Elections) (Folder I: February - September 21, 1970)', Box 6, Dent Papers, pp. 2 & 8.

office.

The logical inconsistency of such support was breathtaking. It appeared barely credible that whilst the President entertained genuine concerns that ‘demagogues can cause confrontations’ in desegregating southern school districts, he simultaneously remained utterly committed to Watson’s rabble-rousing candidacy in South Carolina. By late August 19, 1970, *Newsweek* reporters covering southern school desegregation now rated South Carolina, not Mississippi, as the most likely to explode in violence, with Albert Watson’s gubernatorial campaign the cause.⁹⁷

An incident in the Columbia city school system on October 14, 1970, evidenced the extent to which Albert Watson’s gubernatorial campaign remained utterly interwoven with the politics of race and school integration. A former lilywhite school, A.C. Flora, had become a magnet for white Columbia pupils fleeing assignment to Booker T. Washington: the historically African-American high school in the city. Despite the tension percolating through the city school system, up until mid-October A.C. Flora had remained calm.

The Watson campaign team were involved in the escalation of conflict at the school. At 2:42 PM on October 14, the local police chief received a report of fighting on campus. Arriving at A.C. Flora, police officers found a racial confrontation emerging between approximately two hundred students. Working with teachers, the police managed to separate the aggravated youths, and move the contingent of forty African-American pupils towards a school bus ready to take them home. At around 3:30 PM, two white males in a red

⁹⁷ ‘The South: Southern Strategy Flops’, *The Ripon Forum* (December 1970), p. 15; Daniel Moynihan to Members of the Cabinet Committee on Education (July 23, 1970), ‘Cabinet Committee on Education - State Advisory Committees’, Box 4, Finch Files; ‘Pat Campaigning in Nevada’, *Washington Post* (October 21, 1970); Harry Dent to Dwight Chapin (July 23, 1970), ‘Politics (1970 Elections) (Folder I: February - September 21, 1970)’ & Harry Dent to Staff Secretary, ‘Report for the President's file on his political meeting’ (July 29, 1970), ‘Memos to Staff Secretary’ (February - July, 1970): both Box 5, Dent Papers; Untitled Meeting Notes Beginning ‘8.4.70 (4.45P) / TT - VP – AG’ (August 4, 1970); Hank Leifermann to Jerry Footlick & Joe Cumming, ‘Some proposals and thoughts on the southern school desegregation cover’ (August 19, 1970), ‘School Deseg - Fall 70’, Box 11, ‘School Desegregation, 1954-1970’, *Newsweek* Atlanta Bureau records.

Volkswagen tore up the school driveway, and stopped to take photographs of these students. Observing the camera, the group descended on the car ‘hollering, sticking out their tongues and making threatening gestures.’

The previously quietened crowd of students now began to jump on other cars in the area, and ‘a general state of disorder prevailed.’ According to one A.C. Flora teacher involved in the incident, ‘the action of the occupants in the red car bringing the camera out and using it in such a situation added to the disorder and revived it to some degree.’ When an English teacher demanded to know the passengers’ identity, one ‘answered very forcefully, “I am with Albert Watson’s Staff.”’ Jon Nordheimer of the *New York Times* later found out that both passengers had been state leaders for George Wallace’s presidential campaign in 1968.⁹⁸

With school officials and the police now battling renewed pupil disorder, the red Volkswagen sped away to a local Photo-Graphies store. One of the individuals concerned, Lake High, presented two rolls of 35MM black-and-white film for development to Connie Barley, the sales assistant, announcing ‘I got some goodies.’ When Barley questioned this statement, High explained that inter-racial fighting had taken place at A.C. Flora ‘probably [after]the principal sent a white boy to get Rasmus and Rasmus probably didn’t want to go and Rasmus probably picked up a chair and hit the white boy in the head.’

Earlier that day, Lake High had asked Connie Barley if the Photo-Graphies store could ‘stage a school bus shot of some white girls getting off a bus and some black boys getting off behind them [with] some pushing them down and some tearing the clothes off the white girls.’ Such a scene would have trumped even Wallace’s racist bile in the Alabama Democratic primary earlier that year. High was hardly an outlier in the Watson campaign. In mid-August 1970, *Newsweek* reporters discovered that ‘Albert’s Atlanta tv agency is

⁹⁸ R.G. Stone & T.C. Hardy, Offense Report (City of Forest Acres: October 14, 1970) & Booker T. Johnson, Notarised Statement (Richland County: October 25, 1970): in ‘Desegregation, Public Schools, A.C. Flora Incident, 1970’, Box 31, McNair Papers; Jon Nordheimer, ‘Racial Theme Dominates South Carolina Campaign’, *New York Times* (October 24, 1970).

holding in reserve blatantly racist school bus-oriented spot commercials in the likelihood of opening-week violence in South Carolina.'⁹⁹

Albert Watson defended High's involvement in the A.C. Flora incident. Fittingly, at the time the incident occurred Watson was involved in a heated private meeting with moderate state Republicans who insisted that such race-baiting would cost him the race. As news spread that staff members were involved, Albert Watson's brother Claude, a Baptist minister, stormed in with tears pouring down his face to demand that 'if you don't fire those sons of bitches, I'm quitting the campaign.'¹⁰⁰

Watson stood firm. At a press conference the following morning, he even used the incident as evidence of the necessity for much a much stricter discipline code in schools and passage of an anti-busing statute. Since the incident involved unruly black students largely bused to A.C. Flora from outlying neighbourhoods, the Republican candidate's proposals undoubtedly appealed to white segregationist sentiment. The strength of Watson's appeals was fuelled by escalating violence at A.C. Flora in the wake of the photography incident. The next day, the school principal reported that 'all hell broke loose' as fifty students became involved in an ugly incident during which 'sticks and rocks started flying.' Struggling to reinstate order, school officials dismissed classes. Put in stark terms, Albert Watson's campaign had both contributed to and exploited a wave of racial disorder in a vulnerable South Carolina school. Claude Kirk apart, no other candidate for governor in the South that year was so intimately and cynically involved in the disruption of a local school system.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Connie Barley, Witness Statement (October 24, 1970) & 'Article of Incorporation' (South Carolina: August 17, 1970): both in 'Desegregation, Public Schools, A.C. Flora Incident, 1970', Box 31, McNair Papers; Hank Leifermann to Jerry Footlick & Joe Cumming, 'Some proposals and thoughts'.

¹⁰⁰ Oral History with Daniel I. Ross Jr, interviewed by Herbert Hartsook (October 4, 2001), USCPC, p. 43.

¹⁰¹ David W. Bledsoe, 'Watson Calls For Probe Into School Disruptions' & Kent Krall & Gina Carroll, 'Classes Dismissed After Flora Fight': both in *The State* (October 16, 1970); Benjamin Houston, 'Voice of the Exploited Majority', *Florida Historical Quarterly* 83:3 (Winter 2005): 258-286.

Like Governor Kirk, Albert Watson sought to exploit racial tension for personal political gain. Just as the South Carolina Republican Party sought to build itself on a slippery foundation of segregationist sentiment, so Watson intended to construct an electoral coalition of Nixon and Wallace presidential voters to gubernatorial victory. Since these constituencies were divided by class, religion and region, contemporary state Republicanism sought to bind them together using the messy glue of racial politicking. Having captured the machinery of federal government, the South Carolina GOP planned to begin dismantling the Democratic hegemony that had dominated the state for over a century.

Nixon Scales Back the Southern Strategy

Whilst Republicans like Dent, Thurmond and Watson sought to overthrow the Democrats in South Carolina, President Nixon was more concerned with installing Administration loyalists in Governors' offices and Senate seats across the South. Just as the President dismissed the majority of domestic policy as 'building outhouses in Peoria,' so he was equally uncommitted to investing time and energy in the slow and laborious process of genuine partisan realignment. In the fall of 1969, Nixon accepted an invitation from Strom Thurmond, in front of most of the state's congressional delegation and media outlets, to attend the South Carolina Bicentennial Celebration the following year. In the end, Nixon simply could not face the chore, and sent the astronaut Pete Conrad in his place.¹⁰²

The idea of securing a Governor's Mansion in South Carolina, the heart of the Democratic South, was seen by Nixon as a means of aggrandising his own personal political power. When the White House considered sending David and Julie Eisenhower down to campaign on behalf of the President in South Carolina at the state fair, Dent issued a memo to senior South Carolina Republicans espousing the idea that the visit be used 'in a non-partisan way' to ensure 'tremendous exposure to a big crowd of people plus plenty television,

¹⁰² Roger Morris, 'The President Behind the Mask,' *New York Times* (February 4, 2009); Harry Dent to Hugh Sloan (December 1, 1969), 'South Carolina (1969-1974)', State & Territories, Executive, Subject Files, White House Central Files, NARA.

radio, and press coverage.’ Although Ray Harris, the state GOP chairman, offered a vociferous complaint, Nixon’s mind was already made up.¹⁰³

By the summer of 1970, the President had decided to run his re-election campaign in Dixie as a non-partisan effort. He had also concluded that southern Republicans offered only small-minded solutions to the highly-complex problems of modern American society. In contrast, Nixon was far more intrigued by the prospect of working with southern Democrats whose flexibility and propensity for political audacity impressed the President. Addressing the national media after meeting with the principally Democratic SAC leaders for two hours in New Orleans on August 14, 1970, Nixon applauded ‘the magnificent cooperation from dedicated people in the seven states involved.’ These words were delivered with genuine feeling.¹⁰⁴

As Nixon became increasingly familiar with the southern and ultraconservative Republicans whom he had courted so assiduously during his presidency, so he became disillusioned and uninterested in their politics. Watson and Thurmond represented rare exceptions by virtue of their unwavering loyalty. Others, like the persistently sour and critical Goldwater, were isolated and forgotten. Occupying the White House, Nixon’s attention tended to be piqued by the possibility of consolidating his political power, or the prospect of making a ‘big play’ that would stun the public and media alike with its innovation and audacity. During the summer of 1970, for example, the President became fixated on the idea of spearheading the formation of a ‘conservative’ party that would become the dominant power in American politics. Reviewing polling data showing there to be ‘twice as many conservatives as Republicans,’ Nixon mused on the ‘tough technical and legal problem’ that such a name change presented. Nevertheless, as southern Republicans left their showdown meeting with Nixon on August 6, 1970, the President suggested that ‘Republicans stress on their

¹⁰³ Ray Harris to Harry Dent (August 5, 1970), ‘1970, Correspondence’, General, Box 2, South Carolina GOP Files.

¹⁰⁴ Roy Reed, ‘Nixon Reassures South On Schools’.

bumper stickers to vote conservative rather than Republican.’¹⁰⁵

Southern Republicans were generally incapable of thinking in such complex terms. Indeed, national party critics of the southern strategy seized on the South Carolina GOP organisation as the epitome of parochial southern Republican officials. For example, the state party rejected Nixon’s progressive pilot programme offering free food stamps in impoverished Beaufort County alongside the prospect of a billion dollars to feed the poor nationwide over the course of two years. Instead it remained committed to a system of military style camps where the poor would be ‘taught’ basic life-skills. Ray Harris, state GOP chairman, explained to reporters that ‘we need to teach them how to brush their teeth, for example.’¹⁰⁶

President Nixon grew tired of such antediluvianism. Whilst cynically reneging on many of his responsibilities of office, there were times when Nixon evidenced a private commitment to good governance over personal gain. A good example was the President’s decision not to veto the renewal of the Voting Rights Act that contained a provision lowering the voting age to eighteen. On June 19, 1970, Nixon told Haldeman and Bryce Harlow that ‘politically [the] best course [is to] veto,’ but that he would reluctantly sign the bill into law because ‘a veto permits great demagoguery...you do have an obligation not to have The God Damn country blow up.’¹⁰⁷

Most southern Republicans looked on aghast. Congressional southerners had unanimously voted against the provision, and reported that a presidential veto would ‘help solidify your support in Dixie.’ Moreover, some southern Republicans construed Nixon’s signature on a bill singling out Dixie for exceptional treatment as a violation of the agreement between southern Republicans and Nixon in the spring of 1968. After Nixon

¹⁰⁵ H.R. Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, p. 183; Harry Dent, ‘Report on Meeting of Southerners’.

¹⁰⁶ James M. Glaser, *Race, Race, Campaign Politics, and Realignment in the South* (Yale University Press, 1996), p. 180; ‘South Carolina: Where it all began’, *Ripon Forum* (July – August 1970), p. 61.

¹⁰⁷ Untitled Meeting Notes Beginning ‘6-19-70 / TT - H - BNH - BT - E / 10AM’ (June 19, 1970), ‘JDE Notes of Meetings with the President / 1/1/70 - 6/30/70 (5 of 5)’, Box 3, Ehrlichman Files.

signed the bill, Strom Thurmond composed an incensed letter to the President denouncing the legislation as 'discriminatory' against the South. Thurmond also pointedly added that the southern Republicans who had met with candidate Nixon in Atlanta on May 30, 1968. were baffled by the decision. The day before Thurmond arrived, Nixon had apparently 'told them...that [he] did not favor special legislation aimed at specified states and that such legislation should apply to all states or none of them.' Months later, Dent had briefed wavering southern GOP delegates at the Republican Convention that Nixon's opposition to regional discrimination meant that he could not support the 1965 Voting Rights Act. One Californian Republican even reported that both Dent and Thurmond had advised delegates to 'stick with Nixon on the first ballot because he has promised, if elected, to stop enforcing the Civil Rights and Voting Right Acts of 1964 and 1965.' By signing a bill that his supporters down South considered an act of regional discrimination, Nixon demonstrated a severe lack of commitment to the southern strategy as conceived in 1968.¹⁰⁸

Broader electoral imperatives also worked against a veto appeasing the reactionary southern vote. John Price, special assistant to the President, worried that any action against the Voting Rights Act would inevitably offend 'many traditional and good-hearted Republicans who share your own reservations about a simple equation between integration and quality education, and about busing, but to whom the right to vote sounds like it should be inviolate.' Outweighed by electoral and practical concerns, the southern strategy was unceremoniously ditched. As Dean Kotlowksi has observed, another key factor in the triumph of Leonard Garment and Ray Price's position on issues like voting rights and school desegregation was the superiority of their thinking over conservative firebrands like Pat Buchanan. Ray Price's June 1970 memo on the voting question is a good example. Having noted his opposition to the original Voting Rights Act in 1965, Price carefully explained that, since this provision had become 'part of community expectations...if we appear to be aligning ourselves with the Thurmonds and the Eastlands on this one, we invite the label of blatant racism.' Whereas Buchanan thundered and threatened, Price and Garment coolly appealed to the President's

¹⁰⁸ William E. Timmons to Richard Nixon (June 18, 1970), 'HU 2-4 Voting / 6/1//70 - 7/31/70', Box 20, Human Rights Files, NARA; Strom Thurmond to Richard Nixon (June 15, 1970), Folder II, Presidential, White House Correspondence, Thurmond Papers; Philip G. Grose, 'Thurmond Briefs Nixon On Columbia School Fight' *The State* (August 9, 1968); Pete McCloskey, 'Crises in Both Parties', *San Francisco Gate* (December 19, 2002), accessed from <http://www.sfgate.com> on July 1, 2008.

sense of reason and self-image as a dispassionate leader.¹⁰⁹

Just as Richard Nixon ignored the shrieks of southern conservatives like Strom Thurmond on the issue of voting rights, so he now largely shunned the counsel of the same constituency on school desegregation. Having invested precious time and intellectual energy into this ‘nettlesome’ problem, Nixon simply did not have the patience to deal with frustratingly single-minded interest groups. When Haldeman rebuffed Dent’s request that the President meet with the southern Republican state chairmen, it is instructive that he argued ‘on many of these issues that they want to discuss, the President should not have to get into a political discussion with the chairmen.’ The comment makes sense: the President of the United States should not have to debate with the chairmen of weak state party organisations.¹¹⁰

The southern strategy began to unravel during the summer and fall of 1970 because a President who considered himself a master of complexity became weary of dealing with southern Republicans who offered small-mindedness that was not compensated for by genuine political influence. Only a very select group of loyalists, Albert Watson and Strom Thurmond included, were granted White House favour. The rest were at best poorly tolerated, and at worst thrown out into the cold.

¹⁰⁹ John Price to Richard Nixon (March 5, 1970), ‘HU 2-4 Voting / 1/1/70 - 4/30/70’, Box 19, Human Affairs Files, NARA; Dean Kotlowksi, *Nixon’s Civil Rights*, p. 91; Ray Price to Leonard Garment, ‘Voting Rights Act - to sign or veto’ (June 18, 1970), ‘HU 2-4 Voting / 6/1/70 - 7/31/70’, Box 20, Human Affairs Files, NARA.

¹¹⁰ H.R. Haldeman to Harry Dent (July 7, 1970).

Chapter V

From There to Where?

Beyond A New Republican Majority in the South

Frustrated and disappointed with southern Republican politicians, Nixon's aspirations for the southern strategy narrowed into self-interest. Throughout the summer of 1970, the Nixon White House came under fire from GOP officials and candidates irate that the President had executed federal law. Nixon became fed up of being attacked by minor players in regional politics. After southern GOP candidates failed to make any substantial impression in the midterm elections, he resolved to jettison any notion of party building in the region. Instead, Nixon capitalised on southern Democrats' control over U.S. Congress and their state governments to secure re-election two years later.

Although Robert Mason has elucidated this shift in the southern strategy after 1970, the majority of conventional accounts either assume its continuation in much the same form, or insist that the strategy died after the disappointing midterms. A type of southern strategy undoubtedly continued, but as the personal re-election tool of Richard Nixon and Strom Thurmond rather than an ambitious remaking of southern politics. As political scientist David Lublin has observed, southern Republicanism flourished at the presidential level from the 1960s onwards, but only after the 'shallow pool of Republican talent' was replaced by more experienced candidates did a deeper electoral realignment arrive. In South Carolina, this would not happen until the 1980s. Analysing the early 1970s, it is far more helpful for historians to follow Paul Allen Beck's contemporary conclusion that 'the southern electorate is engaged in a secular dealignment,' which ensured both a Democrat and a Republican might occupy South Carolina's U.S. Senate seats together from 1966 to 2003. Frustrated by the constraints of divided government and an intransigent civil service, Nixon's southern strategy failed to gain any purchase on the imagination of the region's white voters.¹

¹ Robert Mason, *Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority* (University of North Carolina Press, 2004), pp. 173-4; Joan Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered* (Basic Books, 1994), pp. 79-80; Dean Kotlowski, *Nixon's Civil Rights* (Harvard University Press, 2001), pp. 41-2; David Lublin, *The Republican South* (Princeton University Press, 2004), pp. 64-5; Paul Allen Beck, 'Partisan Dealignment in the Postwar South' in *The American Political Science Review* 71:2 (1977).

Reading the Midterm Election Results

This point was decisively illustrated by the 1970 midterm election results. The evening bulletins on Election Day, November 3, 1970, were not encouraging for the Nixon White House. Spiro Agnew's loud predictions of Republican sweeps in the U.S. House and Senate were labelled 'over-optimistic' by CBS' Walter Cronkite, as only Tennessee promised southern gains for the Nixon Administration. By the next day, it was clear that Bill Brock's unseating of Senator Albert Gore in Tennessee's U.S. Senate race constituted 'the only major prize for the Republican southern strategy in 1970.' Privately, White House staffers were downcast. In a memo to John Ehrlichman a week after the election, domestic aide Ken Cole insisted that the South constituted a 'loss' for the Administration.²

The GOP's failure in Dixie was hardly offset elsewhere in the nation, where results left the major parties in stalemate. This represented a personal setback for Nixon's intense involvement in the campaign; intensity not seen by an incumbent President since Franklin Roosevelt's disastrous effort to purge recalcitrant Democrats three decades earlier. On NBC, David Brinkley suggested that the results illustrated the American electorate's unresponsiveness to conservative politics; his colleague John Chancellor posited that the U.S. Senate would remain indifferent to the White House. Liberal news outlets were less restrained. With undisguised glee, *Newsweek* reported that two-thirds of the candidates for whom Nixon stumped had lost, and labelled the southern campaign a 'shambles.' The *Ripon Forum*, in-house journal of a progressive Republican think-tank, wryly observed that despite Nixon's best efforts, 'the 1970 elections strongly indicate that the South is not getting the message.'³

² Summary of CBS Evening News for Tuesday, Nov 03, 1970, *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*: Accessed at <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu> on February 21, 2012; Tony Badger, *New Deal / New South* (University of Arkansas Press, 2007), p. 211; Ken Cole to John Ehrlichman (November 10, 1970), '1970 Post-Election Staff Analysis', Box 23, Ehrlichman Files, NARA.

³ Summary of NBC Evening News for Wednesday, Nov 04, 1970, *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*; 'Magazine Report: Week of Nov. 9, 1970', '1970 Post-Election Staff Analysis', Box 23, Ehrlichman Files, NARA.; Richard Reeves, *President Nixon: Alone in the White House* (Simon & Schuster, 2001), p. 273; 'The South: Southern Strategy Flops', *Ripon Forum* (December 1970), p. 14.

News that Albert Watson had narrowly lost to Democrat John West in the South Carolina gubernatorial ballot appeared to underline the point. Despite Watson's best efforts to appeal to white South Carolina's basest prejudice, enough white voters ignored race-based appeals to stymie the Republican candidate's chances. This pattern was repeated across the region, as a new wave of racially-moderate southern Democrats proved that partisan realignment would not simply be achieved by 'singing the same old songs.' Two *Atlanta Constitution* journalists observed that Nixon's southern strategists 'thought the South was asking for dignity and alliteration, with strong dashes of segregation thrown in. But that was not what the South wanted at all.' Indeed, the defeat of Nixon's protégé in South Carolina constituted 'the extreme failure of Nixon's Southern approach. It didn't work – not even in Strom Thurmond's home state; not even in a state noted for...its succession of spectacular race orators; not even when a man of Watson's oratorical talent was on the stump, waving the bloody flag.'

Despite the Palmetto State's unhappy history of white supremacist politics, voters chose the candidate of racial moderation over a segregationist demagogue. It would later emerge that even Strom Thurmond agreed with this assessment of Watson's defeat. Over the following years, he made a sustained effort to get onto 'the high ground of fairness on the race question.' The defeat of his protégé allegedly made the Senator rethink his own re-election strategy at once. According to a Democratic spy within Watson's headquarters on Election Night, Thurmond's response to West's victory was characteristically blunt and calculating. 'Well,' he explained to a gloomy Watson, 'it means you can't win any longer by "cussin' the niggers.'" Folklore or not, Senator Thurmond would never again campaign as a racial segregationist.⁴

There is an appealing reverse symmetry here with George Wallace's infamous declaration after losing an Alabama primary in 1958 that, 'I won't be out-niggah-ed again'. In the wake of the 1970 election, many commentators thought so. In May 1971, the cover of *Time* magazine boldly declared that the recent election results promised a 'New Day A'coming' in the South.' That August, *Ebony* magazine published a 'New South'

⁴ Hal Gulliver & Reg Murphy, *The Southern Strategy* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), p. 171 & 251; David Stout, 'Harry Dent, An Architect of Nixon's "Southern Strategy", Dies at 77', *New York Times* (October 2, 2007); Jack Bass & Marilyn W. Thompson, *Strom* (Public Affairs, 2005), p. 238; Nadine Cohodas, *Strom Thurmond and the Politics of Southern Change* (Mercer University Press, 1993) p. 412.

issue that included interviews with both John West and Strom Thurmond, wherein the latter rather ambitiously pointed out the many commonalities between the nation's African-Americans and southern whites. Thurmond's appointment of a black aide, Thomas Moss, to his staff lent further thrust to his argument that a new era of colour-blind politicking had arrived⁵

The South Carolina picture was really far more complex. Despite Thurmond's claims to the contrary, Albert Watson had proven acutely successful at 'cussin' the niggers.' Indeed, Watson conducted such an effective campaign that, the day before polls opened, veteran state newspaperman William Workman composed a draft editorial entitled 'Albert Watson Receives A Mandate For Firmness.' Intended as *The State's* response to a Watson landslide, the piece insisted that such a 'thumping' result should 'dispel any notion that a majority of white citizens are resigned to the degree and manner in which desegregation has been forced upon them this year.'⁶

Whilst Workman underestimated the entrenchment of Democracy in South Carolina political culture outside the cities, his assessment of the impression the Republican candidate had made on white voters was accurate. Given the extraordinary hold of the Democratic Party over rural voters, for Albert Watson to receive two-thirds of the white ballot campaigning as a Republican represented an exceptional achievement. A year later, more than half of South Carolina voters identified themselves as Democrats, and only 11 percent Republican. Whether revolting against the Nixon Administration's racial policies, or simply voting reflexively, many white rural conservatives supported John West. As late as mid-October 1970 more than a quarter of voters who considered school integration to be 'bad' still intended to vote for John West, a racial moderate. Ten out of the twelve counties that had voted for George Wallace in 1968 supported West in the 1970 gubernatorial election. What distinguished South Carolina's political culture in 1970 from fifteen years earlier was the fragmentation of party loyalties amongst white voters. Thus the nightmare of segregationists during Massive Resistance was realised: as the Solid South crumbled, voters torn between Democratic loyalty and

⁵ 'New Day A'Coming in the South', *Time* (May 31, 1971); 'White Voices of the South', *Ebony* (August 1971) pp. 164-7.

⁶ Undated draft editorial: 'Albert Watson Receives A Mandate For Firmness', '1970, Elections, South Carolina, Governor / Lt. Governor', Box 8, Workman Papers.

Republican tub-thumping allowed the moderate candidate into the State House.⁷

Thoughtful South Carolina Republicans understood the problems faced by Albert Watson's Republicanism. After Watson's association with the Lamar bus riot of March 1970, the Charleston moderate Arthur Ravenel explained to the *Washington Post* that 'those Wallace people are Democrats and most of the people who supported Nixon are racial moderates. They will turn away from Watson.' South Carolina's complicated voter alignments ensured that not even the fiercest segregationist would necessarily vote Republican. As John W. White has observed, Watson's defeat confirmed the theory that, in the case of GOP candidates, 'extremism would alienate just enough moderate whites to ensure defeat at the polls.'⁸

Voting mechanics aside, Watson presented a fierce challenge to the South Carolina establishment's 'conspiracy of peace' in dealing with massive desegregation. Whilst contemptuous of his personal style, state Democrats recognised that Albert Watson had executed a formidable campaign. In late October 1970, a friend of West's wrote to observe that 'I do not think I have ever seen a harder campaign put on by a candidate than is being put on by Watson and his backers.' The son and brother of Baptist preachers, Watson was a gifted public speaker in the tradition of fire-breathing segregationists like Strom Thurmond and Cole Blaise. The campaign manager for Floyd Spence, who was defeated by Albert Watson in a 1962 congressional race, described him as 'one of the greatest politicians I ever saw in my life, at the local level.' Katherine Wolfe, a close associate of Governor McNair, later explained that 'Watson was a right good vote getter,' whereas 'a lot of people voted for West because they were Democrats.' Indeed, the strength of Albert Watson's campaign forced John West to invest so heavily that he ran out of money both during and after the campaign. Albert Watson had not achieved an unlikely victory, but his mixture of charisma and race-baiting proved a genuine challenge to the entrenched Democratic party establishment.⁹

⁷ Neil Peirce, *The Deep South States of America* (W.W. Norton, 1974), p. 402; Central Surveys Inc., 'South Carolina Voter Opinion Survey, October 2-15, 1970', 'Politics (1970 Elections)' (Folder I: February - September 21, 1970), Folder 180 (CONT), Box 6, Dent Papers, p. 11; Billy B. Hathorn, 'The Changing Politics of Race', *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 89.4 (October, 1988), p. 233.

⁸ William Grieder, 'Lamar School Violence Slows Rep. Watson's Race for Governor', *Washington Post* (March 7, 1970);

⁹ White, 'Race, Grassroom Activism, and the Evolution of the Republican Right in South Carolina', p. 163; Oral

By contrast, Strom Thurmond was too closely identified with the White House to convincingly 'cuss the niggers' in the eyes of South Carolina voters. For twenty-six years, Strom Thurmond's electoral success was rooted in the intensity of his diatribes against federal intervention in Dixie's racial affairs. From November 1970 onwards, Thurmond's strategy for political survival became, instead, intimately related to his influence within the Beltway. Harry Dent, Thurmond's key ally within the Nixon White House, pressed the Senator onwards in this endeavour. Through a series of memos, phone calls and personal conversations during the early months of 1971, Dent implored Thurmond to create alliances with the small cadre of moderates that remained within the South Carolina GOP. One letter that Dent marked 'very personal / please destroy after reading' carefully explained to Thurmond that the purpose of these alliances was to try 'to help you to have these people on your side rather than trying to call you a racist or working against you.' These moderates realised the strength of their position. In a letter to Cordes Seabrook, who had pursued both white and black votes in a successful recent school board election, the group's leader Jim Duffy explained why Dent might seek to install Seabrook as leader of the state party. Not only was Thurmond keen to reposition himself as a less divisive figure, but Dent also realised that his own White House position 'demands victory and he has blown several recently.'¹⁰

Shortly after the 1970 midterms, Dent narrowly avoided being shunted over to the Republican National Committee by a President angered with poor results down South. As Richard Nixon 'fell in love' with Texan Democrat John Connally, a man he believed exceptionally well-versed in 'the use of power' and a future U.S. President, so Harry Dent's influence receded. In an article entitled 'Thurmond "Out" In New Dixie Strategy', the *Columbia Record* reported that 'the President will give priority to the views of Connally on what to do about the South and the Southwest – and most of Nixon's Republican confidants believe Connally will

History with Daniel I. Ross Jr, interviewed by Herbert Hartsook (October 4, 2001), USCPC, p. 20; Oral History with Katherine Wolfe (January 26, 1979), Interview 1/2/3, McNair Oral History Project, pp.42-3; Cary C. Boshamer to John West (October 20, 1970) & David L. Freeman (Greenville attorney) to John West (October 19, 1970), 'West Gub.I., Gen., 1970, October 16-31', Box 16, West Papers; William E. Chandler to John West (December 21, 1970) 'Gen., 1970, Dec. and c. 1970', Box 14, West Papers.

¹⁰ Jim Duffy to Cordes Seabrook (December 22, 1970), Folder 142, Jim Duffy Papers, Clemson; For evidence of Dent's reaching out to South Carolina GOP moderates after Watson's defeat, see: 'South Carolina Politics, Folder II' (June - December, 1971), Folder 307', Box 10, Dent Papers.

counsel him a sophisticated manner.' The article damned Thurmond from all quarters, as well as suggesting 'a diminished role' for Harry Dent. Predictably, the South Carolinian once flattered by the southern press as the epicentre of 'political power' in the White House responded with controlled fury: composing a terse one-line memo to Bob Haldeman observing, 'This kind of thing is circulating in Dixie.' It was no coincidence that Harry Dent added South Carolina's Democratic Senator Fritz Hollings to the White House enemies list in early 1971, just as Hollings' relationship with John Mitchell was intensifying and Dent's influence was receding. Harry Dent was raging against the dying light. Southern Republicans' political immaturity and doctrinal crassness did not sit well with the subtle intricacies of presidential governance. He would have to adapt or die.¹¹

From South Carolina Streetfighter to Beltway Insider

Dent adapted. In January 1971, Rowland Evans and Robert Novak reported that 'two years in Washington have opened Dent's eyes to the calamity that confronts his own party back home if it fails to adjust to the political revolution of the last few years – huge black registration, massive school desegregation, the deflowering of racial politics.' The article's tone and strong evidential base meant that Dent had almost certainly cooperated with the pair as a means of publicly announcing his new strategy to save the southern GOP 'from premature death.' Moreover, it represented a form of revenge for Dent, after a disastrously futile intervention in the South Carolina Republican party's election of a new chairman. Despite the White House official proselytising the cause of racial moderate Cordes Seabrook over a candidate who had recently campaigned against the 'bloc vote,' one upstate committeeman gleefully told a reporter from *The State* that, 'when Nixon hears how badly Harry got beat he'll probably send him off to the island of Elba.' Harry Dent's revenge was taken in a nationally syndicated column, through an Evans and Novak by-line explaining that,

¹¹ John Ehrlichman meeting notes beginning 'Nov 7, 1970 - Key Biscayne - TT, Finch' (November 7, 1970), 'JDE Notes of Meetings with the President / 7/1/70 - 12/31/70 (4 of 8)', Box 4, Ehrlichman Papers, NARA; Richard Reeves, *President Nixon: Alone in the White House* (Simon & Schuster, 2001), p. 285; Joseph E. Mohbat, 'Nixon's Inner Circle Has Set Up Smooth Machine', *The State and Columbia Record* (August 17, 1969); William Safire, *Before The Fall* (Transaction, 2005), pp. 497-501; Harry Dent to Bob Haldeman (February 5, 1971), 'South Carolina Politics, Folder II' (June - December, 1971), Folder 307', Box 10, Dent Papers; Harry Dent to George Bell (January 26, 1971), '1972 Elections - Strategy' (November, 1971), Folder 291', Box 9, Dent Papers. For details of southern Republican's alienation of Nixon, see Chapter 5.

in the broader scheme of political development, the affair might reasonably be considered 'Dent's pyrrhic defeat.'¹²

That Harry Dent had aligned himself with Washington insiders such as Evans and Novak, who just a few years earlier had slated the South Carolina state party led by Dent as racist, demonstrated the impact of two years inside the White House. As Dent became more attuned to the subtleties of governance, so he increasingly alienated provincial state apparatchiks. 'Tell me Mr Dent,' one letter dating from late January 1971 demanded, 'how many elections have these [moderates] won for the party in S.C.?' The author proceeded to answer his own question, referring to men like Seabrook and Duffy as 'the slugs of the party who always talked so much, strutted so often, and did so little.' For this South Carolina Republican, the party had no business indulging in political centrism. Evincing a fantastical conception of African-American demands in the state, the letter concluded with another rhetorical question: 'what would the GOP have to do to get black votes in Richland County? Offer them four or five house spots and \$5,000 in welfare each?' Such ignorant racism was hardly uncommon amongst Dixie GOP regulars. When *Atlanta Journal* reporter David Nordan investigated whether southern Republicans had become 'a new breed of cats' shortly before the 1972 presidential election, his conclusions suggested that little had changed since Novak's description of Dixie GOP members almost a decade earlier as displaying 'an unabashed hostility to the Negro rights movement.' According to Nordan, one southern state chairman found it 'impossible' to refer to black colleagues without throwing out the phrase 'Niggers for Nixon.'¹³

Harry Dent remained prone to such racist outbursts. In May 1972 *Time* reported that Dent had recently 'joked' to southern newsmen about dissident black White House staffers that 'we got a boat for them that's leaving for Nigeria.' Instructively, Dent wrote to the *Time* editor before the story was even published to dismiss it as 'taken out of context.' With two years' political education outside the goldfish bowl of the South

¹² Rowland Evans & Robert Novak, 'Dent's Pyrrhic Defeat', *Washington Post* (January 14, 1971); Robert G. Liming, 'Powell Elected GOP Chairman', *The State* (January 10, 1971).

¹³ Rowland Evans & Robert Novak, 'Integrating the GOP', *Washington Post* (March 22, 1966); Daniel Webster to Harry Dent (January 28, 1971), 'South Carolina Politics, Folder II' (June - December, 1971), Folder 307, Box 10, Dent Papers; Greta De Jong, *Invisible Enemy: The African American Freedom Struggle After 1965* (John Wiley & Sons, 2010), p. 43; David Nordan, 'Republicanism Growing Force in Dixie', *Atlanta Journal* (October 15, 1971).

Carolina Republican party, Harry Dent now realised that such rhetoric constituted a one-way ticket to political oblivion. Interviewed by Nordan, Dent insisted that 'the die-hard super conservatives' unwilling to accept compromise had stunted the party's growth. Dent unsuccessfully attempted to persuade South Carolina Republican regulars of this fact. Writing to a GOP chairman of a rural county, Dent explained that he intended to appeal directly to the 'many' white South Carolinians 'becoming so moderate on the race question.' The assumption itself was questionable, but suggested that Dent, like his ally Strom Thurmond, had personal reasons for advancing along a more moderate tack.¹⁴

Evidence did exist to support Dent's case. A significant contingent of white South Carolinians had modified their attitudes towards school desegregation after a successful transition to a unified system the previous summer. In a survey conducted in the first two weeks of October 1970, thirty-nine percent of state voters responded that school desegregation had been better than expected, with less than nine percent arguing the opposite. Moreover, the race-baiting incident at A.C. Flora was widely perceived as having lost Watson the election. W.A. Cook, a veteran Watson staffer, later recalled that a few days before that incident John West had appeared at a public debate and 'had the most discouraged look on his face I've ever seen. He had the look of a defeated man.' For a state elite that had favoured a 'conspiracy of peace,' Albert Watson's candidacy appeared an unwelcome blueprint for disorder. The January 1971 Novak & Evans column reported that both 'Dent and Thurmond can supply dozens of examples of South Carolina conservatives from the establishment world of business and the suburbs who were outraged by the pungently racist Republican campaign last fall.'¹⁵

That these examples were drawn from civic leaders and metropolitan elites was itself instructive: they represented a minority opinion held by the white upper middle-class who 'were economic conservatives but maybe social liberals.' Few rural whites would have proffered such a damning assessment of the Watson

¹⁴ 'Dirty Harry', *Time* (May 1, 1972); Harry Dent to The Editor of *Time* (April 17, 1972), 'HSD Clippings (January - December, 1971), Folder 333', Box 11, Harry Dent Papers; David Nordan, 'South to Get Catbird Seat?', *Atlanta Journal* (October 19, 1972); Harry Dent to Charles T. Merriner (April 6, 1971), 'South Carolina Politics, Folder II' (June - December, 1971), Folder 307', Box 10, Dent Papers.

¹⁵ 'South Carolina Voter Opinion Survey, 2-15 October, 1970', p. 11; Oral History with W.A. Cook, interviewed by Herbert Hartsook (October 11, 2001), USCPC, p. 40; Evans & Novak, 'The New Southern Strategy'.

campaign. Instructively, a majority of voters polled shortly after Watson's defeat insisted that Senator Thurmond should not 'soften his position on racial integration.' Given that Harry Dent had commissioned the poll, it seems fair to assume that he digested its contents and privately shared them with Senator Thurmond. Dent and Thurmond were drawing away from nakedly populist positions in favour of developing a southern Republicanism as acceptable in the corridors of power of Washington as in the voting booths of South Carolina.¹⁶

Equally importantly, the two began to build alliances with the state establishment both had historically fought so bitterly. What started in the mid-1960s as an ambitious insurgency against South Carolina Democracy and federal intervention in Jim Crow had, by the early months of 1971, metamorphosed into reluctant acquiescence to political reality. In short, Dent and Thurmond began to act more like the astute Texas politician John Connally: a man who understood 'the exercise of power.' As Democratic Governor of Texas during the 1968 presidential campaign, Connally had publicly endorsed Hubert Humphrey but secretly informed the Nixon team that he would make 'no real effort...to work for Hubert in Texas.' Experienced and smart southern politicians realised that the fluid party situation at state and national level mandated a flexibility in allegiances and commitments.¹⁷

President Nixon and Southern Democrats

Nixon was certainly impressed by John Connally. William Safire described Connally's arrival at the White House as 'the President Falls In Love.' Quite apart from its homoerotic overtones, the choice of words indicated the importance of Connally to the Administration's post-midterm political schema. Undoubtedly, Connally appealed to a prosaic desire for more bipartisanship on Capitol Hill. As Senate Minority Leader Hugh Scott pithily observed, 'Connally knows where the Indian trails are, too,' which evidently appealed to

¹⁶ Ross Oral History, p. 44; Central Surveys Inc, 'South Carolina Voter Opinion Survey: November 23-30, 1970', Folder 1, Campaign Polls, Box 29, Thurmond Papers, p. 7.

¹⁷ Dick Garbett to John Schlaes, 'Texas Political Situation' (September 17, 1968), 'Strategy', Box 81, Garment Returned Files, Nixon Library.

Nixon's appreciation for political chicanery. Most importantly of all, John Connally's arrival in the Administration represented the type of grandiose political gesture the President perpetually sought in his politics, not least after an electoral setback. After secret discussions on the appointment in December 1970, Bob Haldeman wrote in his diary that, 'The Connally appointment and the repercussions of it will be one of the biggest things we've done and should be extremely effective in startling the media and the establishment.'¹⁸

The obsession with outwitting 'the media and the establishment' was quintessential Nixon, as was the desire to construct a 'big' political project. For the second half of his first term, the President sought to establish a political alliance with southern Democrats: a group he considered both sufficiently conservative and well-versed in the machinations of Beltway politics. In his memoirs, Nixon admitted having withheld help for the Republican opponents of Mississippi Senators James Eastland and John Stennis, as well as John McClellan in Arkansas; whilst in the fall of 1971 Nixon drew up a list of 76 House Democrats who were not to be opposed due to their friendliness on the Vietnam War.¹⁹ Speaking with Democratic South Carolina Congressman Tom Gettys at a White House photo call in full earshot of the press, Nixon predicted that Gettys would win by a substantial margin. Given that Representative Gettys placed in the top thirteen of House Democrats for his support of Richard Nixon's legislative agenda, it was clear that such an alliance represented sound politics for the White House.²⁰

Election results from 1972 substantiate the claim. Whilst Senator Thurmond and President Nixon won their respective races with outstanding margins of victory, South Carolina Republican candidates fared poorly. Elsewhere in the region, southern Democracy continued to repel the GOP insurgency. One or two

¹⁸ William Safire, *Before the Fall* (Transaction, 2005), pp. 499-501; H.R. Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries* (G.P. Putnam Son's, 1994), p. 216.

¹⁹ In a private meeting with Senator James Eastland of Mississippi, President Nixon explained that he had tried to remove Eastland's GOP opponent from the race, and that Vice President Agnew had issued favourable statements to the Senator in Mississippi. The President asked whether this was adequate support for Eastland, to which the Democratic Senator 'replied affirmatively.' See: William E. Timmons, 'Meeting with Senator James Eastland' (October 9, 1972), 'October 8, 1972', Box 90, President's Office Files, NARA.

²⁰ Robert Mason, *Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority* (University of North Carolina Press, 2004), pp. 173-4; Joan McKinney, 'Congress Opposing Nixon-Backed Bills', *News & Courier* (September 16, 1973).

Democratic officeholders responded to George McGovern's candidacy by switching affiliations, but the bulk simply shunned their party's presidential nominee and supported the President's re-election. The southern governors' conference at the South Carolina resort of Hilton Head rejected the South Dakotan as a 'disaster for the south.' When the South Carolina office of Committee to Re-Elect the President (CREEP) contacted several hundred 'prominent' past and present state Democrats, all but six unhesitatingly planned to vote for Nixon instead of McGovern. A senior official in charge of the Democratic payroll insisted that 'not one dime of my money' would be used against Nixon.²¹

Given that Senator McGovern appointed a twenty-two year old to run his campaign in South Carolina, it is clear that the Democratic nominee understood this political reality. His plan to set-aside ten percent of federal jobs for black Americans, alongside furnishing minority districts with money to encourage voter registration, was hardly calculated to endear the Democratic candidate to South Carolina whites. By contrast, Nixon strategists realised by April 1972 that the Palmetto State merited 'safe defensive' status, which meant that it 'should be a Republican victory, but may need extra resources to offset major opposition effort.' Since Thurmond wished to demonstrate his usefulness as a conduit of such resources, a wave of federal funding was unleashed 'to drown' his hapless opponent. A week before the general election, the national administrator of the Farmers Home Administration toured with Thurmond to investigate federal projects across the state in an ostensibly non-political tour. At meetings in Camden and Aiken, Smith confided to reporters that Thurmond was a 'man who can call the president, and not only that, the president calls him.' The impact of such White House largesse was profound. Nick Ziegler, Thurmond's hapless opponent, only half-joked that, 'if the archangel Gabriel had descended from heaven and endorsed my candidacy in the race against Strom Thurmond, I don't believe it would have made any difference.'²²

²¹ 'Spartanburg's Top Democrat Vote-Getter Switches Party', *The State* (May 31, 1972); Eugene N. Ziegler & Dan T. Carter, *When Power and Conscience Meet: A Memoir* (University of South Carolina Press, 2008), p. 248 & 270; Draft talking paper entitled 'George McGovern and the South', 'Fannie Mae' (November, 1972), Folder 348', Box 12, Dent Papers.

²² Undated Statement by T. Eston Machant, Co-Chairman, S.C. Committee For the Re-Election of the President', 'South Carolina Politics, Folder III' (November 9 - 16, 1972), Folder 413', Box 14, Dent Papers; Minutes from South Carolina Committee for the Re-election of the President Meeting (Columbia, S.C., February 5, 1972), in 'South Carolina Politics, Folder I' (January - April 6, 1972), Folder 411', Box 14, Dent Papers; 'McGovern To Make Play for S.C.', *The State* (August 3, 1972); 'McGovern And Dixie Patronage', *Greenville News* (July 23, 1972).

Strom Thurmond's Reconciliation with South Carolina Democrats

This represented an impressive turnaround for the veteran Senator. In the weeks after Albert Watson's defeat, Thurmond had lagged two percentage points behind Governor McNair in a theoretical 1972 Senate match-up. Shortly thereafter, the GOP candidate for South Carolina's First Congressional District reportedly avoided asking Thurmond to campaign on his behalf lest it 'turn off the blacks in the district.' Two years later, however, Strom Thurmond consolidated his grasp on political power in the Palmetto State. On Election Day, November 7 1972, Thurmond crushed his Harvard-educated Democratic opponent: winning by twenty-seven percentage points. In Florence County, where Ziegler had 'worked and suffered for almost twenty years' as a die-hard progressive, Thurmond beat Ziegler's by over 4,500 votes.

A substantial component of this crushing success was Thurmond's reinvention as a connected Beltway insider who could shower federal patronage onto South Carolina, despite remaining adamantly opposed to programmatic liberalism. Thurmond did not apologise for this attitude. When Ziegler correctly labelled the Senator 'a scrooge in Washington and a Santa Claus in South Carolina,' Thurmond confidently replied that whilst he often opposed social spending on inflationary or ideological grounds, 'if the money is there and it's going to California or somewhere, I'm going to see that South Carolina gets its share.' Palmetto voters did not object to such incongruity. Indeed, one militant African-American leader, Victoria DeLee, endorsed Thurmond after he managed to secure her federal funding for a day-care centre. After senior officials from the Office for Economic Opportunity's Washington D.C. office privately visited DeLee for a 'confidential, factual and very helpful' conversation, a local official hostile to her campaigning was fired. As DeLee colourfully explained to Ziegler, 'Yes, I'm gonna eat them steaks with Senator Thurmond.'²³

South Carolina's white elites were similarly responsive to Thurmond's overtures after the midterm elections.

For decades, Thurmond had railed against their grasp on the state's power bases. Sol Blatt, veteran speaker of

²³ Central Surveys Inc., 'Voter Opinion Survey, South Carolina' (November 23-30, 1970), 'Polls, Folder I,' Box 29, Thurmond Papers, p. 6; Ziegler & Carter, *When Power and Conscience Meet*, pp. 260 & 268-9; Jack Bass & Marilyn W. Thompson, *Ol' Strom* (University of South Carolina Press, 2003), p. 264; James W. Griffith to Harry Dent (March 10, 1972), 'OEO' (March - August, 1972), Folder 392', Box 13, Dent Papers.

the state House of Representatives, was a paradigmatic example. During the 1946 gubernatorial election, Strom Thurmond issued a statement refusing to seek Blatt's endorsement. Journalist William Workman later explained that these attacks 'frequently captur[ed] public attention and newspaper headlines at the expense of his other more mundane platform planks.'²⁴

Whilst ruthlessly competitive, Thurmond understood that politics required the mending of fractured relationships. In the early 1980s, Sol Blatt recalled that 'When Thurmond became governor, he ran on a platform of destroying me, and he tried to do it.' Nevertheless, during a 1980 oral history interview, Sol Blatt also emphasised that Thurmond was 'one of my great friends now,' after he appointed Blatt's son, a Democrat too, as a federal judge in 1971 when, 'as a Republican, he took him over some Republicans, got cussed out about it, but Strom never lost anything by it.' Blatt was right. Inevitably, the state GOP headquarters received many telegrams and letters from party officeholders threatening to resign, and one packed-out state committee meeting in Columbia turned into 'a knockdown, drag-out' affair to the point that a party regular argued so vigorously with Thurmond that other attendees 'really had to pull them apart, they went almost to blows, it was that bad, all about that Sol Blatt Jr. nomination.' Nevertheless, all present at that meeting agreed to support the Senator's re-election bid.²⁵

Thurmond's gambit worked. In the summer of 1972, Sol Blatt announced his support for Senator Thurmond's re-election campaign. Given that Blatt had mentored and supported a quite extraordinary number of prominent state Democrats, this announcement virtually ensured the establishment's support for Thurmond, too. Of particular importance, the appointment persuaded Robert McNair against running for Thurmond's seat the following year. There can be little doubt that McNair, a protégé of Sol Blatt, Sr. from their time together in the South Carolina House of Representatives and close friend of Sol Blatt, Jr. from college, agreed to step aside in 1972 in return for Blatt, Jr. receiving the nomination. McNair had paid his debt to a politician who considered the Governor to be 'one of his boys.' In late July 1971, shortly after the Senate

²⁴ W.D. Workman Jr., *The Bishop from Barnwell* (R.L. Bryan Co., 1963), p. 106.

²⁵ James G. Banks, *Strom Thurmond*, pp. 64-73; Oral History Interview with Sol Blatt Sr. (January 18, 1980), 1/6/1, McNair Oral History Project, p. 33; Minutes taken from the South Carolina GOP executive committee meeting (May 22, 1971), 'Powell, C. Kenneth, Papers, 1971, Gen.', Box 1, C. Kenneth Powell Papers; Ross Oral History, p. 58.

confirmed Sol Blatt, Jr., Dent wrote to Attorney General John Mitchell expressing thanks for 'work[ing] out our recent judgeship matter in a way that would take Governor McNair out of the race. The Democrats had all their eggs in McNair's basket and now the eggs and the basket are smashed.'²⁶

This correspondence confirmed that Richard Nixon had decided to pursue a bipartisan southern strategy regardless of its consequences for local Republicans. Intriguingly, it also suggested that John Mitchell, architect of the 1968 southern campaign, played a crucial role in this process. In this particular case the Attorney General even journeyed to Columbia to personally investigate a rumour that the South Carolina Bar Executive Committee was stalling over an endorsement of Sol Blatt Jr. In late March 1972, Kevin Phillips, the former Justice Department aide and author of the best-selling *The New Republican Majority*, revealed in a syndicated column that Mitchell strongly favoured an alliance with powerful southern Democrats instead of a riskier strategy of relying 'on fledgling GOP state organizations little connected to local power structures.' When Mitchell was put in charge of Nixon's re-election committee, any notion that the White House might rely on the South Carolina GOP to organise the President's campaign was torpedoed.²⁷

Putting the New Republican Majority on Ice

Four years earlier, Mitchell had persuaded Nixon to pursue Deep South votes rather than a more moderate, urban approach. Given Nixon's close association with Linwood Holton, the Virginia Republican who had nurtured a progressive coalition of white civic leaders and African-Americans, this was by no means a simple endeavour. By 1972, Mitchell's task was easier. Frustrated with the mid-term results, the President grew bored of slow party development down South. In January 1971, Harry Dent sent the President a memo detailing efforts to pursue a broader base of support for the South Carolina GOP in the wake of Watson's defeat. A week later the memo was returned unread, with curt instructions from Bob Haldeman that, 'the

²⁶ McNair Oral History 1/11/6 (July 7, 1982), p. 3; Harry Dent to John Mitchell via Sue Morrison (July 28, 1971), 'South Carolina Politics, Folder II' (June - December, 1971), Folder 307', Box 10, Dent Papers. For evidence of the durability of this political 'rumour,' see Wayne Washington, 'Dent abandoned politics and rediscovered religion,' *The State* (January 23, 2005).

²⁷ Edward E. Saleeby Oral History, interviewed by John Duffy (March 5, 1999), USCPC, pp. 40-1; Syndicated column by Kevin Phillips, 'The Political Notebook' (March 29, 1972), 'School Compliance (Desegregation)' (January - June, 1972), Folder 410', Box 14, Dent Papers.

President has indicated to him that he does not want detailed political reports on specific states but only marginal type information.' Genuine Republican realignment in South Carolina would have to wait.²⁸

In his monograph, *Richard Nixon and the Quest for A New Majority*, historian Robert Mason explains that the President's intervention in the 1970 midterms was principally motivated by 'self-interest.' His three aims were a more supportive Congress, pre-emptive attacks against potential challengers in 1972, and to ensure that GOP candidates' campaigns 'included sufficient praise of Nixon and his administration, thus building up his personal political strength.' In this way Nixon's unequivocal support for Albert Watson made sense. Whilst Watson's campaign undermined the Cabinet Committee on Education's efforts to engineer peaceful compliance with school desegregation in the fall of 1970, the Republican candidate represented the quintessential Nixon loyalist.

In 1960, Watson headed up S.C. Democrats for Nixon-Lodge, and spoke throughout the state on behalf of the ticket. Eight years later, Watson became an early supporter of a Nixon and one of the first signatories on a congressional petition urging the Californian to run for President. Once Nixon received the nomination, Watson campaigned throughout the South on his behalf. Even when top Nixon officials travelled to South Carolina in the middle of his gubernatorial campaign to insist that the Republican Administration considered 'freedom of choice' school desegregation plans 'dead,' Watson could only muster a deferential letter of remonstrance. According to Richard Nixon's solipsistic world-view, Watson was the ideal congressional Republican, however toxic his political philosophy.²⁹

On November 3, 1970, Albert Watson not only lost his chance to be South Carolina Governor but also forsook his congressional seat. Deprived of political office, Watson was cast aside by the Nixon White House

²⁸ Frank B. Atkinson, *The Dynamic Dominion* (George Mason University Press, 1992), p. 177; John Osborne, 'Nixon and the Blacks', *New Republic* (December 14, 1968), pp. 19-20; L. Higby to Harry Dent (January 18, 1971), 'South Carolina Politics, Folder II' (June - December, 1971), Folder 307', Box 10, Dent Papers.

²⁹ Robert Mason, *Richard Nixon & The Quest for a New Majority* (University of North Carolina Press, 2004), p. 78; Donald L. Fowler, *Presidential Voting in South Carolina: 1948-1964* (University of South Carolina Press, 1966), pp. 10-11; 'Wallace Campaign Leadership Has Endorsed Watson', *Rock Hill Herald* (October 9, 1970); Albert Watson to Richard Nixon (May 5, 1970), 'South Carolina Politics' (January - December, 1970), Folder 207', Box 6, Dent Papers.

as no longer useful. In the aftermath of his defeat, Watson pressed the White House to make good on its promises, and demanded 'Presidential-level recognition' for his service to the Republican cause. When in 1971 the Nixon Administration stalled on nominating Watson to the U.S. Court of Military Appeals in the wake of strong congressional opposition, his mentor Strom Thurmond angrily wrote to John Mitchell to remind him that the defeated gubernatorial candidate had only reluctantly sacrificed his congressional seat to help the Nixon cause. At the very least, an aroused Thurmond continued, Watson could be named to the U.S. Court of Claims for his troubles. In the end, Albert Watson finished his career in the obscure position of Social Security Administrative Law Judge for HEW in Columbia. Even South Carolina Democrats considered Watson to have been harshly treated by the Nixon Administration. Governor John West wrote in his personal diary that, at a White House function in February 1971, he was 'strongly tempted' to bite into some salami 'and then blow my breath in the President's face and say, "Al sent me."' ³⁰

Furious with a party he considered to have betrayed him, Watson refused to attend the 1972 Republican National Convention. Taking his place was a 32-year-old state Representative from upstate Greenville, Carroll A. Campbell, Jr. In the early months of 1970, Campbell achieved political notoriety by organising the infamous motorcade to Columbia in protest against the impending desegregation of the school system. Many white South Carolinians viewed the youthful, self-made Campbell as the perfect exponent of an aspirational New South politics that downplayed racial issues in favour of laissez-faire, pro-business policies designed to secure low taxes and high employment. Whereas liberal South Carolinians perceived Campbell as simply a polite successor to Albert Watson's politics of racial division³¹, the majority of whites felt comfortable with his politics. This would become a familiar story. In 1992, Bill Saunders, veteran civil rights activist, observed that Charleston's new mayor was 'a young white lawyer that everybody think[s] a good guy,' whereas the

³⁰ Memo: Harry Dent to Fred Malek, 'Reasons for Nominating Albert Watson for the ICC' (April 16, 1971), Box 11, Dent Papers; Letter: Strom Thurmond to John Mitchell (October 22, 1971), Box 11, Dent Papers; Memo: Ed Rector to Harry Flemming & Fred Malek, 'Albert Watson' (February 1, 1971), Box 11, Dent Papers; Charles Wickenberg, 'Watson: Decision 95% Made', *The State* (November 20, 1969), Box 40, West Papers; John West Personal Diary (February 23, 1971), 'West, Personal, Diary, 1971, 19 Jan – Feb', Box 21, West Papers.

³¹ Campbell's victorious 1978 run for U.S. Congress was, however, tarnished by allegations of anti-Semitic campaigning. For a succinct summary, see: Jack Bass, 'Just Like One of Us', in *A Portion of The People: Three Hundred Years of Southern Jewish Life* (University of South Carolina Press, 2002), p. 39.

reality for minority citizens was that 'he's a lot worse than the old fellow that was there before and he's smarter.'³²

Continuity not Change: Party Fortunes in South Carolina after 1970

This form of South Carolina Republicanism postdated the Nixon Presidency. Despite the lessons learned by Dent and Thurmond during the Administration's first two years, the state party remained an immature, unpopular organisation. In the 1990s, one state GOP official interviewed by political scientist James Glaser recalled that during the early 1970s, 'we really had to scrape the bottom of the, um, to look everywhere to find candidates.'³³ As late as 1976, political strategist Lee Atwater could observe that 'political realities...indicated the folly of riding an elephant down Main Street in Greenville.'³⁴

Even in the short period between Nixon's 1972 victory and Watergate, the GOP remained an unremarkable institution within South Carolina politics. Indeed, when Richard Nixon visited the state's General Assembly in 1973, his principal observation concerned 'a couple of very attractive women, both of them Republicans.' Speaking to RNC Chairman George H.W. Bush on the telephone shortly afterwards, Nixon explained that, 'I want you to be sure to emphasize to our people, God, let's look for some...Understand, I don't do it because I'm for women, but I'm doing it because I think maybe a woman might win someplace where a man might not...Boy, they were good lookin' and bright.' Instructively, the President paid such little attention to male Republicans during the visit that Bush wrote an apologetic note to the GOP chairman, C. Kenneth Powell,

³² John Brady *Bad Boy*, p. 36; S. Russell Merritt, 'The Success of Greenville County, South Carolina, in Avoiding Public School Resegregation, 1970-1990', *Equality & Excellence in Education* 28:3 (1995), p. 52; Bill Saunders testimony to U.S. Civil Rights Commission (June 19, 1992), in *Perceptions of Racial Tensions in South Carolina* (May 1995).

³³ This was not uncommon. In 2010, Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour recalled that, at 25, he was the oldest Republican county chairman in his home state. See Andrew Ferguson, 'The Boy from Yazoo City', *The Weekly Standard* (December 27, 2010).

³⁴ James M. Glaser, *Race, Campaign Politics, and Realignment in the South* (Yale University Press, 1996), p. 180; John Joseph Brady, *Bad Boy: The Life & Politics of Lee Atwater* (Addison-Wesley, 1997), p. 51.

lamenting 'how frustrating it is when the President comes to town and then can't do all the things that we'd like him to do to build the party.'³⁵

The South Carolina GOP remained more curiosity than phenomenon. When James Edwards, future Republican Governor, arrived at the state senate in 1970, his desk-mate was shocked at the newcomer's naiveté: recalling that 'he had a bill up, so help me, that cut the entire state budget, every item, ten percent.' Whilst such a severe cut might have made good politics in a local race, it constituted reckless governance. Edwards quickly learned to moderate such radical notions in favour of a more sober approach to the point that one legislator recalled that Democrats 'were very fond of Jim Edwards....The four years he was there, he didn't play politics.'

In this manner, Edwards conformed to the Dent and Thurmond model of aggressive campaigning followed by far more moderate governance that has been outlined in this thesis. Like Thurmond and Dent before him, once burdened with executive responsibilities Edwards quickly abandoned such crudity in favour of a more consensual style. His fellow party members did not. One senior GOP official later explained that, 'I don't recall Republicans ever learning anything. The party resembled more a suicide cult. It was not important that we win the general election, but it was of first importance who controlled the party.' The post-1970 battle over Nixon and Thurmond's new southern strategy represented the culmination of a decade of infighting. This civil war had distracted from party registration drives. During the 1974 GOP primaries, Edwards campaign team found that there were only 25,000 registered Republicans in South Carolina.³⁶

In contrast with the sclerotic Republican party, the majority of South Carolina Democrats were doggedly pragmatic. When Adlai Stevenson III addressed a national Democratic Party fundraiser in upstate Florence in

³⁵ Chris Goffard, 'New batch of Nixon tapes released', *Los Angeles Times* (June 14, 2009); George H.W. Bush to Ken Powell (April 20, 1973), 'Powell, C. Kenneth, Papers, 1973, Jan – May', Box 1, Powell Papers.

³⁶ Saleeby Oral History, pp. 17 & 36-7; John West to William Workman (October 16, 1970), '1970, Elections, South Carolina, Governor / Lt. Governor', Box 8, Workman Papers; Email exchange between author & Hal Poe (26-27 October, 2010); Bruce H. Kalk, *The Origins of the Southern Strategy* (Lexington Books, 2002), p. 69; Arthur Ravenel, Jr. to Strom Thurmond (May 19, 1971), 'Judgeship - Sol Blatt, Folder I' (April - May 19 1971), Folder 273', Box 9, Dent Papers; Ross Oral History, p. 47.

February 1970, not a single prominent state party official attended. As Earl and Merle Black have observed, the southern Democratic Party was a surprisingly durable and adaptable creature, particularly when forging an unlikely alliance between segregationist Yellow-Dog Democrats and black voters. Decades of power had institutionalised the party as an intimidatingly monolithic entity. When the General Accounting Office audited the two state parties in 1972, it found that the Democratic party had failed to report \$276,000. This figure was \$100,000 more than the GOP's entire budget for the same year. As the news editor of an upstate newspaper confidentially explained to Ken Powell in the autumn of 1972, Democratic 'Southern Big Daddies' remained in charge to the point that 'many publishers do not want to rock the boat and go Republican overnight and lose a lot of advertising.'³⁷

In the 1950s, South Carolina Republicans complained that 'with a one party system, you could catch a guy stealing and the penalty for somebody stealing in state government was a banquet and retirement.' Two decades later, similar rules applied. Powell liked to argue that the Democratic Party in South Carolina was more 'economic system' than political party. His analysis was meritorious. As late as 1986, Democratic activists were allowed to 'help' voters decide for whom to cast their ballot in the polling booth. As one GOP officeholder astutely observed, 'the poll managers weren't crooked, they were just doing what had always been done.' The Solid South took a long time to crumble. In Barnwell County, bastion of Palmetto Democracy, the GOP did not win an election until 1988. As Kari Frederickson has observed, 'the very difficult, start-and-stop nature of the *process* of political change' ensured that complete party realignment took at least four decades to achieve after South Carolina's initial break with the Democratic Party in 1948. Although conventional narratives grossly underestimate Frederickson's point, recent scholarship has begun to address the incredible survival skills of southern Democrats in the 1960s and beyond.³⁸

³⁷ Rowland Evans & Robert Novak, 'Democratic Dinner in S. Carolina Significant in List of Absentees', *Washington Post* (February 12, 1970); Earl & Merle Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans* (Harvard University Press), pp. 160-8; B.J. Panto to Ken Powell (September 23, 1972), 'Powell, C. Kenneth, Papers, 1972, May - Oct SC. 1972' & Statement issued by Ken Powell (January 11, 1973), 'Powell, C. Kenneth, Papers, 1973, Jan - May': both in Box 1, Powell Papers.

³⁸ Oral History with Daniel I. Ross, Jr., interviewed by Herbert J. Hartsook (October 4, 2001), USCPC, p. 18, 34 & 96-7; Author's interview with Ken Powell (April 2, 2010); Kari A. Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt* (University of North Carolina Press, 2001), p. 4. For examples of recent accounts taking southern Democratic resilience seriously, see: Earl & Merle Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans* (Harvard University Press, 2003); Thomas Edmund Packer, 'Jesse Helms and North Carolina Politics, 1972-1984 (D Phil Thesis, Oxford University, 2011), pp. 151-184; Paul

A striking illustration of this resilience occurred during the West campaign of 1970. Concerned that West's efforts to appeal to white segregationist sentiment had alienated black voters, the campaign provided around \$100,000 of 'campaign funding' in unmarked bills for local black leaders to use as they saw fit to help aid a Democratic victory. Even so, West's victory wasn't just about such financial shenanigans. Black voters readily realised that state Democrats, despite often deploying insensitive rhetoric, represented their best bet. This was not a novel development. In the mid-twentieth century, Senator Olin Johnston had constructed 'an unholy alliance' with African-American voters, who tolerated naked racism to support his progressive stance on economic issues. Undoubtedly, John West adopted a brave and unusually liberal stance on desegregation. Indeed, the Governor's associates who liaised with the black community insisted that West's criticism of a resolution cosponsored by Albert Watson directing the State Library to remove certain 'pro-desegregation' books had proven 'the deciding factor in convincing the black community that they should enthusiastically endorse me.'³⁹

In a sense, West's 1970 campaign represented a culmination of the conspiracy of peace: a mixture of back-room negotiations, strong public stances against disorder, and a curious biracial alliance that smacked more than a little of racial paternalism. James Clyburn, the first black executive officer on a South Carolina Governor's staff, was later frustrated to hear John West extract a promise from George McGovern that a McGovern Administration would exempt South Carolina from the Voting Rights Act. As Clyburn pithily observed to West about the impact of this legislation, 'how the hell do you think you got in?' This odd mixture was ethically dubious at best, yet South Carolina Republicans' efforts to replace such moderation with rebellion proved a far more dangerous mode of politics and governance, both for the party itself as well

Luebke, *Tarheel Politics: Myths & Realities* (University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Bob Moser, *Blue Dixie: Awakening the South's Democratic Majority* (Times Books, 2008); Alexander P. Lamis, *The Two Party South* (Oxford University Press, 1990); Tim S.R. Boyd, *Georgia Democrats, The Civil Rights Movement, and the Shaping of the New South* (University Press of Florida, 2012).

³⁹ Author's interview with Donald Fowler (April 10, 2010); Thomas Chadwick Oral History, interviewed by Herbert Hartsook (June 26, 1995), USCPC, p. 8; Philip G. Grose, *Looking for Utopia* (University of South Carolina Press, 2011), p. 113.

as South Carolina society.⁴⁰

Richard Nixon's Curious Southern Alliance

That Richard Nixon bought into this 'opening Pandora's box' model of campaigning is curious. As Matthew Lassiter has observed, Nixon's natural base lay in the suburbs of metropolitan Charlotte and Columbia; not the fields of Edgefield, South Carolina or Sunflower County, Mississippi. Contemporary analysts struggled to rationalise the Californian's interest in the Deep South, not least since it could not be effectively wooed with national-type appeals. As one liberal activist warned the White House, a racist southern strategy would inevitably fail as 'the only way to outflank George Wallace is to go into the Gulf of Mexico.' Contingency played more of a role than long-term strategising in 1968. Realising that Strom Thurmond's support might help carry a few border south states and South Carolina itself, Nixon and his campaign manager John Mitchell chose to adopt a more southern strategy in a very tight tripartite election.

With the blessing of Thurmond, Richard Nixon's southern strategy proved electorally very successful in South Carolina in 1972. In a 'unique', idiosyncratic realignment, the President won the Palmetto State with over 70 percent of the popular vote. Instructively, the bases of Nixon's support that year were almost identical to those of Strom Thurmond. The relationship between the President and white South Carolina continued even after Watergate. In the late 1970s, Daniel I. Ross Jr., a senior GOP official, explained to a colleague that 'Nixon [was] very popular on the precinct level. There's no man ever more popular. The people in this state believe that Nixon made South Carolina part of the nation.'⁴¹

Boorish and unsubtle, Strom Thurmond was hardly Nixon's type of southern politician, and was quickly marginalised once Nixon assumed office. Thurmond received few invitations to meet with the President

⁴⁰ Alexander P. Lamis, *The Two Party South*, footnote 13 at 353.

⁴¹ Matthew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority*, p. 232-3; Editorial, *The Ripon Forum* (July-August, 1970), pp. 3-4; Matthew Lassiter, 'Suburban Strategies', in *The Democratic Experiment*, edited by Meg Jacobs, William J. Novak & Julian E. Zelizer, p. 332; Harry S. Dent, *The Prodigal South Returns to Power* (John Wiley & Sons, 1978), p. 230; Louis M. Seagull, *Southern Republicanism* (Wiley, 1975), pp. 106-7; Daniel Ross Oral History, p. 91.

during the 1972 presidential election. When the Senator met with Nixon on September 21, 1972, it was to attend the signing of HR 10670, 'a bill providing for the survivors of retired military personnel,' alongside forty-four congressmen and for a grand total of six minutes. Correspondence between the two was courteous, but displayed none of the genuine warmth and friendship that characterised letters between Thurmond and Vice President Spiro Agnew.⁴²

Conspiracies of Peace

It is no surprise that Nixon bought into Thurmond's rhetoric of southern victimhood, given the President's abhorrence of federal bureaucracy and sympathy with Dixie. Nonetheless, President Nixon and Thurmond never developed more than a relationship of convenience. A more natural alliance existed between Nixon and Governor Robert McNair. One survey showed that South Carolina voters considered the two ideological counterparts. This quantitative data was substantiated by correspondence between the two, which demonstrates that Nixon and McNair enjoyed friendly relations. Both unequivocally supported the idea of 'law and order,' and imagined themselves as a moderate buffer between left and right; black radicalism and white supremacy. Indeed, both Robert McNair and Richard Nixon expressed a misplaced confidence that cautious change regulated by white elites could salve the wounds of centuries of racial discrimination.⁴³

By way of contrast, in his famous Howard University Commencement Address, President Lyndon Johnson accepted that groups who had historically received unequal treatment could not compete fairly against a privileged social group. Moreover, both McNair and Nixon privately revealed the roots of such racial paternalism: arguing that their formative relationships with minority groups gave them an ingrained sense of empathy. Divided over Nixon's southern strategy, Governor McNair and President Nixon were united by a

⁴² Conversation No. 105-6 (September 21, 1972), 'Nixon Presidential Materials Staff - Tape Subject Log': accessed at nixon.archives.gov/.../find/tapes/.../tapesubjectlogs/720908ca105.pdf on June 23, 2012. For examples of this correspondence, see folders marked 'Presidential' in White House Correspondence, Strom Thurmond Papers.

⁴³ Oliver Quayle & Co., 'A Survey of the Political Climate in South Carolina' (August 1966), '1966, Survey of the Political Climate in South Carolina', Box 8, Workman Papers; McNair Oral History 1/11/1 (April 16, 1982), p. 2; Richard Nixon to Robert McNair (July 15, 1970), 'Armed Services, Vietnam, Presidential Fact-Finding Commission, 1970', Box 28, McNair Papers.

cautious conservatism. As the NAACP's Roy Wilkins observed after Nixon's address at the Republican National Convention in August 1968, the candidate 'sounds as if he is asking fair treatment for Negroes but at the same time he is advocating state control under which the poor and the minorities have been deprived of their fair share of Federal programs.'

Three months later, in the wake of the Orangeburg Massacre the Revd. I. DeQuincey Newman issued a similar complaint about Governor McNair. Whilst not blaming McNair for the incident itself, Newman called for a 'no-buying Christmas campaign' to protest against the Governor and the white state establishment having 'washed their hands like Pontius Pilate.' Just as Richard Nixon ranted and raved against civil rights militants, white and black, whom he criticised for poisoning civil rights discourse, so Robert McNair foolhardily pursued a scapegoat for the killings. The blame fell upon Cleveland Sellers, a SNCC official who had been attempting to organise the college students who would suffer such disproportionate treatment at the hands of the state. When the Solicitor of the First Judicial Court delayed processing the Sellers case, McNair composed two angry letters in quick succession, even offering up the help of another Solicitor and the Assistant Attorney General to help expedite the trial.⁴⁴

It is easy to fetishise electoral strategies as a coherent entity; useful short-hand for a variety of historical impulses that coalesce neatly around a particular presidential candidacy. This thesis' title represents one such example. The conceit is problematic. By doing so, historians can omit a broader, more nuanced story. The failure of the GOP's southern strategy in South Carolina should not obscure the fundamental problems that remained in the aftermath of Albert Watson's defeat, but neither should its existence blind us to the fact that the Nixon Administration, whether intentionally or through institutional pressure, tended to act in ways that ideological southern Republicans found intolerable.

⁴⁴ Gareth Davies, *From Opportunity to Entitlement* (University Press of Kansas, 1996), p. 70; 'Wilkins Sees Negroes "Chilly" to Nixon's Acceptance Address (August 10, 1968) & 'South Carolina NAACP Calls for Bleak Xmas To Voice Indignation' (November 23, 1968): both in *News From NAACP* collection, accessed at the Vere Harmsworth Library, Oxford, England; Robert McNair to Julian S. Wolfe (September 10, 1968 & October 28, 1968), 'Orangeburg Incident, 1968, Sellers, Cleveland, 1969-1970', Box 30, McNair Papers.

Removing the ill-fated southern strategy from discussion, Nixon's fundamental problem, like McNair's, was that he simply did not feel the urge to consider advice from African-Americans on its own terms. Just as Richard Nixon fought elections in white suburbia, so the his Administration's policy-making evinced a similar lack of concern for black opinion. Once in office, Nixon's southern strategy became a smokescreen for something far more insidious: the reinforcement of racial privilege that, in the emotive words of James Patterson, was tantamount to a 'white noose' around black necks. 'What blacks wanted,' was refracted through the lens of what suited whites best. In a straight shoot-out between white privilege and black demands, the latter rarely triumphed over the former.⁴⁵

In a similar vein, Robert McNair's firm stand on school desegregation in 1970 represented brave and decisive politics, but he arrived at the decision based on the spectre of federal intervention rather than genuine concern for African-American rights. In short, thoughtful exponents of the conspiracy of peace realised that compliance, not defiance, represented the most sensible strategy for South Carolina whites. As Fred Sheheen, a mainstay of white South Carolina public life in mid-century, later observed of the fall-out from the 1970 election, 'It is not now polite to run political campaigns in South Carolina based on overt racism. But I believe a strong undercurrent of racism still exists covertly in our political life and governmental policies.'⁴⁶

The point that acquiescence to racial reform actually worked in white elites' favour is important. South Carolina civic leaders' dedication to the State Advisory Committee was not simply a moral choice, but actually represented sound business. In *Dixie Rising*, an account of 'how the South is shaping American values, politics and culture,' the journalist Peter Applebome astutely described the 'utterly unexpected way the civil rights revolution turned out to be the best thing that ever happened to the white South.' Indeed, some of the most perceptive analysis of white resistance to civil rights has explored the notion that segregation represented irrational support of racial privilege at the expense of material development. According to economic historian Gavin Wright, 'southern businessmen were locked into low-level equilibrium, in which

⁴⁵ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1970* (Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 74.

⁴⁶ Email correspondence between Fred Sheheen & Author (March 8, 2011).

their own perception of prejudice on the part of white customers was a crucial factor.' On a more micro-level basis, business elites 'often found ways to bend and adapt these customs when financial interests were at stake,' but they simply did not believe that ordinary whites would accept broader change.⁴⁷

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 dramatically forced their hand. As Numan V. Bartley wrote of the wave of New South governors who arrived into power in the late 1960s and early 1970s, 'the policies of the new governors confirmed the triumph of the moderates and completed the transfer of power from county courthouses to metropolitan boardrooms.' Economic development no longer suffered from the strictures of Jim Crow. A detailed analysis of textile integration conducted for the trade journal *Textile Industries* in the late 1960s found that many company executives viewed the Civil Rights Act as a vital prop to ending financially-inefficient discriminatory practices. One executive interviewed by the journal explained that the legislation was 'a blessing in disguise for us.' Indeed, civil rights groups monitoring South Carolina textile industry 'frequently described how companies used the hiring of blacks as a means of increasing workloads and introducing new forms of discrimination.'⁴⁸

The federal government's regulation of southern racial affairs worked most successfully when it co-opted the support of elites desperate for economic development. Nixon understood this aspect of southern political culture, and consequently developed public policy predicated on the notion that the carrot, not the stick, was the most effective means of successfully implementing school desegregation. As Bryce Harlow carefully explained to Nixon, the crucial public-relations aspect of the Administration's approach to desegregation was to demonstrate that 'the Nixon policy is different.' Whilst not different in the manner many white southerners had hoped back in 1968, President Nixon did alter the dynamic of federal civil rights enforcement efforts. By ensuring all school districts received full ESEA⁴⁹ funding, and only handing out discretionary funds to those

⁴⁷ Peter Applebome, *Dixie Rising* (Random Books, 1996), p. 17; Gavin Wright, 'Southern Business and Public Accommodations', Paper presented at Business History Conference, Sacramento, CA (April 2008), pp. 19-21. Accessed at www.stanford.edu/~write/papers/ParadoxR.pdf on June 25, 2012.

⁴⁸ Numan V. Bartley, *The New South, 1945-1980* (Louisiana State University Press, 1995), p. 404; McNair Oral History 1/11/10 (September 1, 1982), p. 7; Timothy J. Minchin, *Hiring the Black Worker* (University of North Carolina Press, 1999), pp. 50-1 & 63.

⁴⁹ Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965) money accounted for a significant proportion of school funding in

districts that complied fully with federal guidelines, Nixon incentivised school boards to act in a racially-just manner, but did not penalise those that refused. Through nurturing southern elites' desire for development, the federal government achieved substantial, if inconsistent, gains in racial equality.⁵⁰

An excellent example occurred in a series of correspondence between Columbia's Richland County No. 1 School District and HEW. During the summer of 1972, the Office for Civil Rights in Washington D.C. received 'information' indicating that unauthorised rezoning had occurred in the school district, which had changed the Lyon Street School from 72 percent black to at least 92 percent. Rather than instigate sanctions under Title VI, HEW simply advised Claude Kitchens, Richland No. 1 superintendent, that 'your district is not eligible for ESAA assistance.' The ploy worked. After a few months attempting to force HEW into a compromise, Kitchens simply gave in: copying almost verbatim the criteria laid down by HEW's Atlanta branch for securing funding, and thereby securing the pot of ESAA funding.⁵¹

As one recent political science paper has observed, 'paying for progress' represented the most effective way through which the federal government reformed southern schools. Nevertheless, the limitations on federal power ensured that racial discrimination remained a chronic problem in Dixie's school systems. Almost immediately after the beginning of the 1970-71 school year, reports flooded in detailing chicanery and downright discrimination. In September 1970, the *New Republic* published an article entitled 'Another Vanishing American: The Black Principal.' Based on a two-week study of seventy-seven school districts in Louisiana and Arkansas, the National Education Association described 'the near total disintegration of black authority in the system of public education.'⁵²

South Carolina: see chapter one for further details.

⁵⁰ Bryce Harlow to Richard Nixon, 'Draft of President's Statement on School Desegregation' (June 10, 1969), 'Desegregation - (Presidential) Statement / July 1969 (CFOA 5019)', Box 79, Garment Papers.

⁵¹ 'Richland No. 1', Box 8, 'School District File' in 'Division of Administration & Planning, Office of Technical Assistance & Surveys, State Department of Education', South Carolina Archives.

⁵² Elizabeth Cascio et al, 'Paying for Progress: Conditional Grants and the Desegregation of Southern Schools', NBER Working Paper No. 14869 (April 2009).

Forwarding the article to HEW Secretary Elliott Richardson in mid-November 1970, OCR Chief Stanley Pottinger added that the observations were corroborated by both his office and the Justice Department. OCR investigations of three-hundred southern school districts desegregated voluntarily uncovered at least seventy-five districts with racially segregated classrooms based on tracking procedures. Meanwhile, the Justice Department received complaints pertaining to several hundred districts in the South. Despite this evidence of serious violations, the Nixon White House refused to issue a statement on in-school segregation for publication in the *Federal Register*. Indeed, when Richardson spoke to Ed Morgan, the White House aide in charge of minimising the political disruption of massive school desegregation, the HEW Secretary received 'a strong indication at that time we should not' issue any such guidelines.⁵³

The Nixon White House's position was not particularly unusual. During the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations, a succession of Attorneys General and their assistants on civil rights had emphasised the necessity of respecting the federalised nature of the state, and consequently refused to intervene in even the most egregious cases of racial discrimination down South. As Burke Marshall, Kennedy's assistant attorney general for civil rights, has observed of the legal situation of school desegregation plans prior to 1964, 'it is as if no taxpayer sent in a return until he personally was sued by the Federal government.'⁵⁴

Given that Nixon had no personal interest in heavy-handed regulation of southern race relations, it is unsurprising that South Carolina's white elites could continue to act with impunity when their interests clashed with those of African-Americans. In 1974, the flagship black high school in the state, Booker T. Washington, was closed; purportedly due to the age of the infrastructure. In reality, the school occupied prime Columbia real estate, and the University of South Carolina, *alma mater* to so many state officials, wished to expand onto its land. When local blacks tried to 'reserve our heritage' through protest, the school district was wholly unsympathetic. This was hardly surprising, given that one board member regularly

⁵³ J. Stanley Pottinger to Elliott Richardson (November 19, 1970), 'Civil Rights, Office of, Meeting with Atty Gen: 11/20/1970', Box 139, Richardson Papers; Telephone conversation between J. Stanley Pottinger & Elliott Richardson (November 12, 1970), 'Telecons-1-15 October', Box 128, Richardson Papers.

⁵⁴ Marshall even authored a monograph on this subject. See Burke Marshall, *Federalism and Civil Rights* (Columbia University Press, 1964).

referred to poor black children as 'horrible.' As a result, this predominantly white university annexed and demolished a high school popularly considered 'the Great Mother of the Black community.'⁵⁵

A New South?

Overt racism gradually disappeared from public life in South Carolina. By 1974, the Republican gubernatorial candidate, Jim Edwards, was advised of the necessity of campaigning for the black vote: not because any Republican could capture that constituency, but because 'there's a great clientele out there that will vote against you if they think you're anti-black.' When, as Governor, Jim Edwards received President Gerald Ford at the South Carolina State House, the same advisor included a substantial proportion of African-Americans onto the guest list. Looking around at the faces beamed across the nation, Edwards' reaction was, 'My God, we're on national television and we've got blacks galore. Brilliant, absolutely brilliant.' As Jacqueline Jones has observed in the *Journal of Southern History*, the question that historians need to ask in this connection is, 'What are the political uses of racial ideologies, and who benefits from these ideas, and how, in any particular time and place?' Just because white South Carolina politicians no longer spoke in segregationist terms does not mean that they operated in ways that significantly addressed the legacy of centuries of black persecution.⁵⁶

Historians of conservatism have tended to focus on groups or individuals who bitterly opposed and steadfastly resisted liberal reform. The language of 'counter-revolution' and 'resistance' has dominated narratives of a conservative 'backlash'. In South Carolina, Strom Thurmond epitomised this typology, but it also competed with a subtler brand of Bourbon conservatism that eventually triumphed as a sustainable political model. The 'conspiracy of peace' accommodated civil rights change as a necessary price for

⁵⁵ Beryl Radin, *Implementation, Change, and the Federal Bureaucracy*, p. 100; Jacqueline A. Williams to Lamar Clements (March 30, 1976), Richland No. 1, Box 8, 'School District File', South Carolina State Archives; James L. Felder, *Civil Rights in South Carolina* (The History Press, 2012), p. 173; Cliff LeBlanc, 'Hundreds return home to Columbia's Booker T. Washington', *The State* (June 15, 2013).

⁵⁶ Numan V. Bartley, *The New South, 1945-1980* (Louisiana State University Press, 1995), p. 404 ; Ross Oral History, p. 44 & 52; Jacqueline Jones, 'Labor and the idea of race in the American South', *Journal of Southern History* 75:3 (August 2009), p. 614. For insider evidence that the Nixon Justice Department operated similarly to that of Kennedy and Johnson, see: Brian K. Landsberg, *Enforcing Civil Rights* (University Press of Kansas, 1997), pp. 111-2;

maintenance of the social order. This thesis has demonstrated that the white political reaction to civil rights in South Carolina was not a battle between conservative and moderate, but actually over two different typologies of conservatism. Intriguingly, the same ideological battle was fought within the Nixon Administration, and presided over by the President himself. One recent survey of conservative historiography has called for the examination of 'political contestation' within conservatism. Intriguingly, in the cases of South Carolina politics and the Nixon White House, ideological zeal proved less appealing than flexible accommodation. That McNair and Nixon required political courage to pursue accommodation with Supreme Court decisions is not inconsistent with their own conservative beliefs. In the course of time, both realised that 'law and order' imposed obligations on politicians and the people alike.⁵⁷

In 1960, William Workman described the contemporary challenge for white South Carolina as the 'continual adjustment and readjustment of relationships.' Whilst fuzzy and ambiguous, the words represented a sharp contrast from some of the absolutist rhetoric circulating elsewhere in Dixie. In short, Workman's advice was that a balance had to be drawn between interest and belief; between order and white supremacy. In the 1970s, bullets and brickbats would be replaced by multi-member voting districts and private schools as subtler bulwarks of white privilege. Orville Vernon Burton, the pre-eminent historian of South Carolina race relations, has detailed the extraordinary resources white South Carolinians were willing to invest defending voting systems mitigating African-American electoral power. Edgefield County, Strom Thurmond's birthplace, incurred a 'tremendous cost' during a whole decade of litigation to protect discriminatory at-large voting systems favouring the majority white populace.⁵⁸

Two decades after his famous article for the *Saturday Evening Post* on the desegregation of Clemson College, George McMillan reported in very different tones about a private school in the state whose supporters 'came close to destroying' the local, predominantly-black public school system. The contrast

⁵⁷ Elizabeth Tandy Shermer, 'American Conservatism: An Historiographical Renaissance Without Much of a Reconsideration', *Journal of American Studies* (April 2012), p. 488.

⁵⁸ William Workman, *The Case for the South* (Devon-Adair, 1960), p. 229, quoted in John G. Sproat, "'Firm Flexibility": Perspectives on Desegregation in South Carolina', in *Race & Slavery in America*, p. 164; Orville Vernon Burton et al., 'South Carolina', in *Quiet Revolution in the South*, edited by Charles Davidson & Bernard Grofman (Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 209-10.

between McMillan's upbeat article on Clemson in 1963 and this later article is striking and deflating. In similar terms, the U.S. Commission of Civil Rights' report on South Carolina race relations published in the 1990's made for sobering reading. One thoughtful academic reluctantly concluded that 'we have learned to tolerate intolerance and to be intolerant of tolerance.' Most strikingly, the state advisory committee was 'troubled by the refusal of public officials, white and black, in all three cities to participate in the briefing meetings and to respond to excerpts of the draft of the report.' Little appetite for reform existed.⁵⁹

Only one black state trooper served at Orangeburg on the tragic night of February 8, 1968. Forty years later, George Dean was asked how far the civil rights era had shaped relations between white and black in South Carolina. 'There's a different code of racism now,' Dean replied in language reminiscent of William Faulkner, 'I would say that most change in the South, and most change in my town, which I love so dearly, is cosmetic. The new South ain't so new.' Nixon's southern strategy may have faded into irrelevance after 1970, just as white South Carolina elites began to publicly acknowledge the inevitability of racial integration. This represented progress. Nevertheless, scholars must not fall into the trap of assuming that the Palmetto State experienced an 'end of history' in racial matters after West's triumph over the politics of division espoused by Albert Watson. That the unlikely trio of Nixon, Thurmond and Dent failed in their quest to institutionalise a reactionary brand of Republicanism within the Palmetto State should not conceal the larger truth. A quarter century after V.O. Key subtitled his chapter on the state 'the politics of color,' white supremacy remained a defining feature of South Carolina politics and society.⁶⁰

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⁵⁹ George McMillan, 'Beaufort Academy – “None Ever Applied”', *Southern Changes* 4:6 (1982), pp. 3-4; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Perceptions of Racial Tensions in South Carolina: 'Letter of transmittal'*, pp. 7 & 16.

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