

5-14-2004

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# **Southern Comfort:**

Patronage and Populism in Southern Politics

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May 14, 2004  
Political Science 3000-Thesis  
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## **Introduction**

The southern United States is arguably one of the most politically powerful regions in the United States due to its tendency to vote as a single unit in Presidential elections. During periods of Democratic control of national politics in the New Deal Era the South “made a major contribution,” and today Republicans “dominate the South’s presidential and congressional elections” (Bullock and Rozell). This tendency is one that both the major political parties focus a great deal of attention on and have done so for some time. In days past the South was a Democratic voting bloc for which Republicans had to compensate. “For almost a century after Reconstruction, the South provided the foundation on which the national Democratic Party rested” (Bullock and Rozell). Presently, the area is more of a battleground with many Republican candidates appealing to the social conservative traditions that have been advanced, and Democrats trying to argue economics and jobs to the poverty-stricken region. The strength of the South as a political power in the form of a voting bloc is one that begs the question what development is coming to the region with such extensive power? At first glance it seems that the region has not developed economically and socially in terms of education, health care, and other public services. This lack of growth is inconsistent with the regions extensive political power.

The analysis of poor development in the South leads to at least two possible conclusions. The first of these possible conclusions being that the region is not actually powerful and is marginalized in the national arena. The success of many southern politicians would tend to be in contrast to such a conclusion. Presently, the South has held the Whitehouse continuously, with two Clinton Administrations (from Arkansas),

and one George W. Bush Administration (from Texas), for twelve years, and has had a strong hold on the leadership in the Senate and House. Furthermore, there is a history of success in national politics by southern political actors. With such compelling evidence of achievement in national politics it is reasonable to dismiss the claim that the region lacks power.

The second possible conclusion is that the power garnered by the political actors of the South is not being used for economic and social advancement. Many can successfully argue that the southern United States has taken huge strides towards diversifying its economies. The South has moved away from what was a totally agrarian economy to a mixture of manufacturing, service, agriculture and other industries. However, what these arguments fail to explain is how the diversification of the Southern economy has been the product of national political power being leveraged. In most cases when government is involved the state governments create attractive tax options and lucrative discounts on public fines, however those are only the cases when the government is involved. This argument of economic diversity seems inadequate after evaluation of the political influences on the movement, and this inadequacy leaves in place the question of what is the outcome of the political power in the South?

In addressing the discussion of a lack of development in the South, some social and economic indicators prove useful. The following table consists of a selection of a few categories that stand out in making the argument that the South is being left behind the rest of the country. Perhaps most notable is the story told by the category of “most livable” states, and the rankings received by four Southern states.

## 2002 Southern State Rankings

State	Louisiana	Mississippi	Alabama	Arkansas
~Most Livable Rank	49	50	48	47
*Per Capita Personal Income Rank	45	50	47	43
*Poverty Rate Rank	2	6	9	4
*Percent of Children Living in Poverty Rank	4	21	6	1

\*- Rates according to the 2000 figures provided by the Census

~- A composite view of 43 ranking categories performed by the editors of State Rankings 2002: A Statistical View of the 50 United States

The selected figures from the statistical overview of the United States illustrate the notion that the South is drastically far behind the remainder of the country in terms of social and economic progress. It would stand to reason that with such strong political leverage, the South could easily secure funds to reverse these trends through public assistance, and programs aimed at combating the problematic social conditions. Of course, not every social program is successful; however, the expenditures on public assistance and social service of Southern states indicate that the Southern leaders are not “bringing home the bacon,” so to speak. With most Southern states ranking in the lower middle group of the nation in expenditures on public assistance and public welfare programs (State Rankings 2002), one is left to question how effective the Southern leaders are at supporting their constituencies.

Low government expenditure on social programs was not always the norm. The “Solid South” firmly supported Roosevelt’s New Deal, which nationally brought high expenditures on social programs (Bartley and Graham, p. 13). In some ways there was an economic populism tradition that the New Deal gave to the South which could be seen in the elections of the Longs in Louisiana, Lyndon B. Johnson in Texas, W. Kerr Scott in North Carolina, Olin D. Johnston in South Carolina, James Folsom, John Sparkman and Lister Hill in Alabama, and Albert Gore and Estes Kefauver in Tennessee (Bartley and Graham, p. 25). This economic populism was only short-lived though, as the racial issue of the South quickly took center stage with “relative ease” (Bartley and Graham, p.25).

With a disregard for the economics of the South one could easily question the motivation from the electorate for the election of their leadership. Consequently, the question of why Southern voters elect non-representative leadership and allow them to hold a vast amount of power drives the study of Southern politics. To answer such a question there are several possible explanations. One possible explanation that most drastically stands out is the thought that Southerners are voting against their economic interest. The reasons that Southerners may vote against their interest are differentiated based on race, as white southerners tend to vote differently from black southerners. In order to investigate the reasons why Southerners vote differently based on race, one must first understand that race is, and has been, a key factor in most of the political action of the South. Whether it is whites trying to keep blacks from voting, or blacks organizing through bloc vote, the relationship between whites and blacks in the South is significant to its politics. “In its grand outlines the politics of the South revolves around the position of the Negro” (Key, *Southern Politics*).

Why, then does race play such a central role in the political framework of the South? Why does the South not know advancement and progress through the government, and how does race factor in to the breakdown of the government?

These questions require an understanding of the development of Southern politics. The South prior to the Civil Rights movement and the Voting Rights Act was solidly Democratic.

“Because the low turnout and single-party character of Southern politics is not explained by the poverty of the region, we must look to centuries of slavery and segregation, together with corollaries of elitism, the alien reputation of the Republican party and the reluctance of white politicians to carry their competition outside of the Democratic Party.” (Shankansky, *Regionalism in American Politics*)-Bartley and Graham-20

This explanation gives understanding to the long-standing single party politics of the South through illustrating why no Republican efforts advanced prior to the Voting Rights Act. In addition to the presence of only one strong political party, abject poverty and a feeling of hopelessness dominated the black population of the South. Hanks argues that "throughout the rural South, it is common to find blacks who feel that their local officials are not interested in attracting industry to their area" (Hanks, The Struggle for Black Political Empowerment, p. 92). The economic repercussions of this lack of activity are keeping "wages low, work scarce, and the environment intimate" (Hanks, The Struggle for Black Political Empowerment, p. 92). The intersection of the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act, with the economic conditions of poor blacks and whites created two significant changes in the politics of the South. The South changed drastically with the inclusion of black southerners in the process of electoral politics with the Voting Rights Act. The party choice and the ramifications of the party choice of the newly enfranchised black voters led to another serious change in the political landscape. Because of the

Democratic Party's growing support for civil rights legislation and position of inclusion, many of the newly enfranchised African Americans became members of the Democratic Party. Another drastic change in Southern politics occurred in the same time frame as Strom Thurmond, the well-known South Carolinian Senator, left the Democratic Party and joined the Republican Party because of his disagreement with the Democrats regarding the position of the Party in favor of civil rights. When Strom joined the Republican Party he brought with him many "reactionary" white voters who followed his lead in expressing their distaste for civil rights (Kuzenski, *South Carolina: The Heart of GOP Realignment in the South*).

This change of the average voter from Democratic to Republican along racially charged issues still shapes the South. Similarly, populism and the lack of economic development also play significant roles in the Southern political landscape. It is the convergence of the racial, economic, party and populist trends that will be the focus of the following study in an effort to better understand where the power of the South is being used.

### **White Voters in the South**

Prior to the 1960s the white voter was the only voter of any substance in the South. The southern United States was referred to as the "Solid South" due to its tendency to vote as a bloc in favor of Democrats. The South became a foundation for the Democratic Party due to several reasons but most importantly the resentment of Republican Civil War administration, and a Republican drive to "insulate the dominant industrial elites" from the costs of the industrial growth (Bartley and Graham, p.7).



Additionally, the marginalized role of the formerly powerful parties such as the Whigs and the Jacksonians helped further the dominance of the Democrats in the South.

The single party presence in the South did not necessarily indicate a single mind-set of Southerners. One particularly valid example of conflict within the Party can be seen in the bi-factionalism in Louisiana revolving around the Long family. The Long and anti-Long factions centered their debate on the delivery of public goods to the people of Louisiana versus cost-effective “reform” of government. The Longs were economic populist who attempted to increase public spending on social programs such as health, welfare and education at the expense of industrial development (Bartley and Graham p.34).

Typically the Longs enjoyed success whenever there was a Long running at the top of their ticket (Bartley and Graham, p.34). The personality of the Longs factored into the elections in significant ways. In his 1956 gubernatorial election bid Earl Long was running against dsLesseps S. Morrison, whom he referred to as Del-a-soops for wearing expensive suits, and spraying perfume under his arms; all of this increased Longs popularity in the rural electorate (Bartley and Graham p. 35).

This personality driven style of election raises the issue that many successful Southern politicians have been labeled demagogues. One such politician was Eugene Talmadge of Georgia. Talmadge created a great deal of political capital for himself while serving Georgia as the state commissioner of agriculture. In a scandal that almost got him impeached, Talmadge claimed, “Yeah, it’s true. I stole, but I stole for you. You men in overalls. You dirt farmers.” (Arsenault, *The Folklore of Southern Demagoguery*). Once he was quoted as saying that the only friends the Georgia farmer had were “God,

Sears and Roebuck, and Eugene Talmadge” (Arsenault, *The Folklore of Southern Demagoguery*). What was inconsistent in his statement is that his policies were often times detrimental to the poor Georgia farmers. Talmadge was a believer in low taxes, small government and was a “rabid” Negrophobe (Arsenault, *The Folklore of Southern Demagoguery*). At one point Talmadge refused to fund a State Health Board plan to build x-ray facilities in rural areas claiming, “Country folk don’t believe in germs” (Arsenault, *The Folklore of Southern Demagoguery*).

The obvious disconnect between Talmadge’s popularity and his policies that were harmful to the poor Georgia farmer raise some questions about what makes a Southern politician effective with white Southern voters. Talmadge connected with his Southern poor white electorate through his Negrophobia, and his ability to be seen as a man of the people, “a true dirt farmer.” It seems that there are two possible themes that may present themselves in the study of Talmadge in contrast to the study of the Longs. The first of these being a connection with the white Southern poor through economic populism in, some form or another, and social programs to create opportunity for the poor. The other being a racial populism, for lack of a better term, which rallies supporters behind a candidate on the basis of opposition to civil rights for blacks, and a continuation of the white Southern way of life.

The 1950 South Carolina Senatorial primary race between Olin D. Johnston and Strom Thurmond illustrates the conflict of these two forms of populism. Within the race both candidates “espoused their devotion to segregation,” but one candidate had more credibility in that debate (Bartley and Graham, p. 26). Strom Thurmond, as the Dixiecrat Presidential candidate of 1948, had cast himself as strongly segregationist. The issue that

truly separated the candidates was their economic views. Johnston supported the economic populism of the New Deal, and Thurmond strongly opposed it (Bartley and Graham, p. 26). Johnston ultimately won the election, which may serve as a signal that all things being equal, both candidates are in favor of racial issues that appeal to white Southerners, the economic issues appeal to the poor white voters. The view that economics may have a strong pull when the racial issues are not the heart of the debate does not last once blacks become a stronger voting presence.

At one point the voting significance of blacks in elections was described as “five-dollar counties” as a term to describe the cost per vote of neighborhoods (Bartley and Graham, p. 29). These black votes delivered to white candidates would translate to street repairs, protective law enforcement, and other public goods for black neighborhoods from the White government. These bargains declined as blacks became more organized and effective in the electoral process (Bartley and Graham p. 29).

With the passage of the Voting Rights Act Southern politics changed drastically. The Democratic Party’s strong support of civil rights that Harry Truman had advocated ultimately led to the defection of many Southern poor white voters, after the Dixiecrat Revolution in 1948 (Seagull, Southern Republicanism, p. 10). Strom Thurmond’s defection is possibly the most visible of the losses from the Democratic ranks, but with him he brought many other poor white southerners who were disgruntled with the Democratic position on civil rights. Perhaps the one of the first signs of the waning Democratic dominance can be seen in Alabama in the Presidential election of 1964. Goldwater won Alabama and carried many Republicans into office with him, and in so doing he “showed that white Alabamians would vote Republican and Democratic

loyalties could not be taken for granted at the presidential level” (Stanley, *Alabama: Republicans Winning the Heart of Dixie*).

These new Republican voters did not necessarily mesh well with the business foundations of the Republican Party (Kuzenski, *South Carolina: The Heart of GOP Realignment in the South*). The business elites were Republicans because of socially and fiscally conservative positions not necessarily because of racially motivated reasons. Furthermore, the new Republicans were by and large the poor whites who were almost singularly motivated by race in their membership in the party. In South Carolina, this “uneasy partnership” (Kuzenski, *South Carolina: The Heart of GOP Realignment in the South*) very quickly became a “symbiotic” relationship (Kuzenski, *South Carolina: The Heart of GOP Realignment in the South*).

“The pro-business faction provided money, material resources, and leadership to build the party organization, while the more racially motivated white flight faction provided badly needed votes to score early Republican successes in local, state, and national elections.” (Kuzenski, *South Carolina: The Heart of GOP Realignment in the South*).

Republican politicians began eliciting white support through “skillful manipulation of racially imbued issues such as opposition to Affirmative Action and public assistance programs” (Kuzenski, *South Carolina: The Heart of GOP Realignment in the South*). David Duke, a former grand-wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, propelled himself into the runoffs of the 1991 Louisiana gubernatorial election by running a conservative campaign focused on government spending and playing on peoples "fears and resentments" about race and welfare (Maginnis, Cross To Bear p, 270). This style of “manipulation” suggests that the effects of a racially motivated populism still hold strong within the white communities.

A more modern practitioner of the racial populism that attracts white voters is Jesse Helms of North Carolina. “Helms represents the new style of right-wing Southern Republicanism” claims Arsenault, “While there can be little doubt that he remains a committed white supremacist and a devout sectionalist, Helms operates in a political arena that is vastly different from the traditional system of the ‘Solid South’” (Arsenault, *The Folklore of Southern Demagoguery*). The “new style” of Republican that Helms represents is one that uses the tools of racial populism to gain power, and then attack “alleged welfare cheaters, avant-garde artists, radical feminists and ‘bleeding-heart’ liberals of the ACLU” (Arsenault, *The Folklore of Southern Demagoguery*). While most of the Southern poor are not necessarily “radical feminists, or bleeding-heart liberals” there are many who are on welfare.

This apparent contradiction in economic interest and voting of the Southerners who elect leaders such as Helms is baffling at best. The apparent manipulation is something that the white southern voters are choosing repeatedly. While their economic concerns are not focused upon, they still select a populist candidate who speaks to the racial issues or social issues of the time.

What this voting phenomenon illustrates is poor efficacy of the two-party system. Many hypothesized that with a choice between candidates and parties the South would begin to see development. The example of the 1950 South Carolina Senate primary comes to mind as voters acted in their economic interest when the choice was presented to them. With racial populism being tied directly to opposition of the economic interest of the majority in many campaigns in the South it is difficult to see the successes of the two-party system.

While this is disturbing in the white southern communities, a similar enigma occurs in the black southern community.

### **Black Voters in the South**

The black southern population has been disregarded in a different way from the poor white southern population. The leadership of the black southern population has manipulated its following through machine politics and organization that limits true participation. This manipulation has come in the form of those seeking political office having to pay homage to the organizations in place and ultimately court the organization rather than the voters that they influence. This practice has led to a select few within the black community having a disproportionate ability to influence the agenda of the representatives of the black community and creating a market for exploitation.

The black political power structure developed after the gains of the 1960's which brought a new hope of enfranchisement and political participation to the African American community. In an attempt to win local and statewide elections many Southern Blacks organized their efforts and many of these campaigns brought success. The experience of the early success led to several groups forming through the newly developed networks. These groups traditionally centered around a few neighborhoods or predominantly black areas in urban settings. The tradition experienced mission-creep, as the groups grew more powerful and became a source upon which external forces seeking the support of black voters could rely.

## **History of the black vote and the development of a black political power structure**

Prior to the 1960's the power holding white majority of the South denied the African American population the right of the vote through systematic efforts. This attempt to disenfranchise the black population understandably translated to a very limited role in the government for blacks, and consequently the governments of the South served the white populations much more effectively than the black populations. The disproportionate power of whites was eventually rectified through the 1965 voting rights act, and by the federal examiners' effort to "assist in opening the franchise to the sizable number of black southerners still barred from the polls" (Bartley and Graham, p. 111). Before these efforts the voter population in the south was one of predominantly upper-class whites, with mediocre participation from lower-status whites and "little at all" from blacks (Bartley and Graham, p. 111). After the enfranchisement of the mid-60's "more than 50 percent of black southerners went to the polls," and the "figure continued to climb" throughout the remainder of the decade (Bartley and Graham, p. 111).

The successes of the increase in political participation among low socio-economic status blacks was led by, and led to the development of organizations to solidify the black political voice. Some argue that the work of the organizations is and was necessary to increasing the participation among blacks by creating a "group consciousness" (Hanks, p. 38). The Council of Federated Organizations, or COFO, was formed in 1964 in an effort to elect black leadership to government offices while arguing that blacks participate at much higher rates when the black voters accept a "group consciousness" (Hanks, p. 38). The Council of Federated Organizations in Georgia was formed as one of many groups

throughout the South to attempt to elect blacks to office. The implicit goal behind having blacks in office is to empower blacks in the “public policy formation process” (Hanks p. 38). The goal of increasing the black voice in elected politics is approached in different ways considering the two distinct Southern black populations being rural and urban.

Historically, many rural blacks were in severely impoverished, and worked as sharecroppers with little personal wealth or the opportunity for asset accumulation. "Three-fourths of the Negro farmers were sharecroppers or tenants by 1900" and they "saw very little cash at all during the year" (Krousser, The Shaping of Southern Politics, p. 65). Prior to the Voting Rights Act, many rural blacks were unable to participate in their county governments even though they were the dominant population (Frye, Black Parties and Political Power, p.29). The lack of participation in government and limited opportunities allowed for the possibility of an extremely receptive voting bloc of black rural voters after the Voting Rights Act. The Lowndes County Freedom organization (LCFO) in rural Alabama attempted to organize the rural black electorate and create the "group consciousness" in order to "take over" county governments (Frye, Black Parties and Political Power, p.29). The ultimate goal was the same as that of the urban organizations but needed to be accomplished in a more "confrontational way" when dealing with the existing political framework in the rural South (Frye, Black Parties and Political Power, p.29).

Some argue that the efforts of the mobilizing organizations have not reached their ultimate goal of economic or social progress for blacks and that the political empowerment has been “limited”.

“The most significant changes wrought by the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s – the elimination of most formal barriers to Black political



participation and increased access to previously segregated occupations and professions – appear to have had negligible impact on the nations underlying racial hierarchy.” (Affigne, *Black Voters and the Urban Regime: the Case of Atlanta*)

The counter argument, to the black organizational success raises the question of what are their accomplishments in terms of tangible benefits to the black community. In response to such a question several point to the strong relationship between African Americans and the gains in traditional party politics. The foundation of the relationship between blacks and the Democratic Party is one that dates back to the enfranchisement of African Americans. The civil rights legislation of the 1960s “made possible a massive transformation of the southern electorate; hundreds of thousands of Negroes finally entered the electorate, as Democrats” (Seagull p. 15). Some feel that the long-term relationship between the Democratic Party and African American voters is one characterized by exploitation. They contend that in Democratic administrations “blacks should receive 20 percent of party patronage, since they constitute roughly that percentage of the Democratic National Vote” (Smith, p. 131). This idea is in its most basic contention a return to the concept that blacks are organized and vote consistently with one ideology.

Something that contests such an assertion of organization and “group consciousness” is the success of many African Americans in the Republican Party. President George W. Bush, a Republican, has appointed the first black Secretary of State, Colin Powell, and Condoleezza Rice the National Security Affairs advisor, a position that has taken on added importance under the Bush administration. Additionally, Clarence Thomas was appointed to the Supreme Court under George H. W. Bush, a Republican. While the success of blacks in the Republican Party has been fairly limited, there is no

doubt a presence of high achieving African Americans in politics beyond the Democratic Party.

In response to the traditional two-party political system, some have called for the creation of a third party to dissolve the “racial hierarchy” in America. Jennings argues that “a third party” that would challenge the “philosophical and political tendencies of the Democratic and Republican Parties regarding social welfare, economic growth and development, and foreign affairs” is “essential” (Jennings, *Responding to Racism and Crisis: Building a Third Party*). While it is difficult to see how another third party would be more successful than the plethora of third parties that already exist, the necessary element for the party’s electoral success would be in the organization and mobilization of voters. This fundamental requirement refocuses the discussion on the efficacy of black political organizers in the current political landscape.

Affigne asks, “Are there more effective ways to mobilize Black voters” (Affigne, *Black Voters and the Urban Regime: the Case of Atlanta*)? In asking this question he explores the degree of failure of the leadership of the black political community in Atlanta in terms of the social and economic development of the African American population. He contends, “The apparent stagnation in Black economic and social progress and the resurgence of racially divisive political rhetoric would both suggest that Black political empowerment has in fact been limited” (Affigne, *Black Voters and the Urban Regime: the Case of Atlanta*). Atlanta became a majority black city between 1960 and 1970, according to the census, while outmigration of affluent whites developed suburbs surrounding the city (Affigne, *Black Voters and the Urban Regime: the Case of Atlanta*). The subsequent growth of the black political power structure led to a black led

city government. What the growth did not lead to was social progress for the black community.

In 1992, under the black led city government of Atlanta 46 percent of black children live in poverty, compared to 42 percent in the 1970 white majority of Atlanta; in 1992, 9.8 percent of blacks were unemployed while in 1970 had an unemployment rate of 4.7 percent for blacks; and there were 7,517 black elected officials in 1992, with only 1,469 black elected officials in 1970 (Affigne, *Black Voters and the Urban Regime: the Case of Atlanta*).

Ultimately, Atlanta can serve as a model of “well advanced” black empowerment, with results from the city’s elected black officials and the disconnect with growth in the black community. What these numbers articulate is that the growth of black political power does not necessarily translate to black social progress and economic progress. A possible explanation of this phenomenon can be found by citing the close ties between the black governors and the “white leadership of the economy” (Affigne, *Black Voters and the Urban Regime: the Case of Atlanta*). Consequently, the organized efforts to create “group consciousness” among black voters, discussed by Hanks, yields among the managers of the organizations a black upper class that becomes the politically elite. Quite simply, “Increased political power has produced significant gains for the Black middle-class, but little for the Black poor and working-class” (Stone, *Regime Politics*).

Affigne cites this problem as being one of poor participation by those within the black community. Only "half of Atlanta's voting-age Black residents were registered to vote in 1993, and barely one-fifth of the potential Black electorate cast ballots" (Affigne, *Black Voters and the Urban Regime: the Case of Atlanta*). Affigne claims that increased

black mobilization would create "conflict between the established Black leadership and an increasingly restive black population" (Affigne, *Black Voters and the Urban Regime: the Case of Atlanta*).

The problem of poor mass participation stretches to other black political organizations. The Southern Organization for United Leadership, or SOUL issued endorsements in Louisiana's 2003 elections that did little to garner wide spread support among the African American communities. SOUL lost most of its endorsed races, and only held onto one Senatorial seat which faces a term limit (DuBous, Gambit, 11-25-03). SOUL, like COFO and many others was formed with the mission of electing blacks to office and ultimately create progress for the black community. In 1966 in the Ninth Ward of New Orleans SOUL set out to elect the city's first black member of the Orleans Parish Democratic Executive Committee and accomplished its goal (DuBous, Gambit 3-20-01). The group's power instantly grew from its first successful election. The ability to effectively organize black voters and elect black politicians was something that had not been seen before, and became a very powerful tool in many other races. Moon Landrieu, a white politician who went on to become a multi-term mayor of New Orleans, sought the endorsement and support of SOUL in his 1969 election bid (Boulard, Gambit 02-05-02). While maintaining the networks that developed the groups continued to have success and ultimately formalized the relationship by selecting leadership to head the group and provide direction. The power continued to grow as the political actors outside of the black community often times went to SOUL or groups like it to obtain the black vote. Edwin Edwards, four-time governor of Louisiana claimed he could not have won the 1971 election if it were not for the support and endorsement of SOUL (DuBous, Gambit

3-20-01). This example of power only added to the strength of the group, however, the more recent weaknesses of the organization pose many problems for the future of black politics.

While Affigne's critique of the urban organization scheme is significant, the rural black voter must not be disregarded. The rural southern black voter faced different barriers to voting when compared to their urban counterparts. In 1965, Atlanta's Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) partnered with the Hancock County Democratic Club (HCDC) in an effort to eradicate the fears of rural black voters and create an organization to influence politics in favor of the black community (Hanks, The Struggle for Black Political Empowerment p 59). The groups transformed the "largely apolitical black community" in rural Hancock County to become politically aware and registered to vote (Hanks, The Struggle for Black Political Empowerment p 60). This transformation was evident in the 1966 election of black candidates to the Board of Education and as County Commissioner, and further exhibited in 1968 when Hancock county became the "first bi-racial county in America to be controlled by blacks," with two blacks serving on a three person Board of Commissioners (Hanks, The Struggle for Black Political Empowerment p 51, 60). This electoral success was consistent with the gains of the urban organizations of the time. Another consistency of the rural gains with that of the urban group are questionable results beyond the electoral victories. With economic development being the pursuit of the black leaders, it is easy to render the judgment that the group fell short. "The dream of eliminating poverty" that was driving the black political agenda in the rural area "never became a reality" ((Hanks, The Struggle for Black Political Empowerment p 93).

Whether it be from a third party, more participation that may agitate the current political power holders, a better informed and politically charged black electorate, or more responsible leadership from the current elected officials, one thing is clear: the Southern black voter is in need of a more responsive government.

"The black political empowerment process has, in theory, three measurable phases: (1) blacks holding office to their numbers in the population (2) the enactment of public policies favorable to the black community; and (3) the rise in the socioeconomic status of the black community. In most political jurisdictions across the black belt South, this process has not even reached phase one." (Hanks, The Struggle for Black Political Empowerment p. xi).

Currently, the Southern black voter is being used for their vote with little given in return.

## **Discussion**

The Southern political environment is one that is full of contradictions. A potential giant that appears to be so happily relaxed that it will have difficulty flexing its muscle when it needs to.

One observation that may be telling in helping to understand the political culture and power of the South is found in the way in which the South has garnered a great deal of national attention from political parties. That attention is given to the South because of the presence of strong correlation of votes by Southern states in national elections. The tendency to vote as a bloc that is strong in the South is quite possibly the result of the greatest flaw of the Southern political realm. The South can vote as a bloc because many of the voters are manipulated to vote based on single-issue appeals. White voters typically vote for the conservative candidates who use or imply racial populism in their campaigns, while black voters often times vote for the choice of the organizing party, or

consistent with the "group consciousness," regardless of the actual return on their vote in terms of social and economic development. These efforts at manipulation are well coordinated, insofar as the groups expend tremendous amounts of energy to ensure the survival of the differing styles of manipulation, and are the product of a long line of Southern political evolution.

The political evolution that has taken place in the styles of organization and coercion of votes is derived from the political landscape of the South of yesteryear. The presence of the black political organization is a direct descendant of the Civil Rights movement and the enfranchisement of the Voting Rights Act. The thinking at the time, which still seems logical, of electing blacks to office to better represent and serve the black community in its quest for advancement dominated the mission of the groups. Currently that mission is still present, but the efficacy beyond winning elections is in question. The political evolution of the "Solid South," from an inner-Democratic party debate over social and economic issues to the emergence of a two-party system has yielded a style of populism based on race. The support of the Democratic support of the Civil Rights Act and the subsequent Republican membership increases is still observed today in the rhetoric and actions of modern day demagogues who appeal to the large group of poor white Southerners.

This political evolution is one that does not often forget its roots. Many black political organizations will continue to support black candidates for office, even if those candidates are not actually helping the black community they are elected to serve and the racial populism exemplified by Helms of North Carolina that is effective with white communities is led by a "conservative" veil that can thinly mask attacks on social

progress for minorities. However, with the poverty intact and little advancement coming to the region, the enigma of Southerners voting for leaders who do not create opportunities continues to defy reason.

It seems as if the South is trapped. If the people of the South begin to select different leaders based on more tangible prospects for economic and social advancement, at the cost of possibly voting inconsistent with the other Southerners, then the power of the South in the national arena is diminished. Consequently the ability to access federal funding to support the economic and social advancement could become more limited. However, if the South chooses to continue to elect leaders who do not serve the real interests of the electorate there is virtually a guarantee of little to no advancement. This may prove to not be the case if the Southern electorate realigns itself with economic issues and becomes a voting bloc along similar economic lines.

However, for such a realignment to occur, both the white racial populism and the black organizational structures would need to virtually disintegrate. The white voters would have to realize that welfare, and public assistance are programs that benefit poor people, not just poor black people, and consequently not vote along the "conservative" lines of the "new-style right-wing Republicans." Additionally, black organizations would have to be able to endorse the candidate who served the economic advancement of both black and white communities, regardless of race. Both of these occurrences seem highly unlikely, to say the least.

In returning to the current political framework, observing the black political organizations, Affigne's criticism seems astute. The black organized political efforts have created a black middle class and have done little to serve the larger black



community. His prediction that more political participation within the black community could create a tension between the black middle class and the remainder of the community is something to take note of. With an increase of participation and the subsequent tension that is predicted perhaps there would be an effective approach to solving the economic and social problems of the black community. In the white racial populism that has become predominate among white Southern voters; an incorporation of economic factors into the selection criteria of "new-style right-wing Republicans" would serve the interests of the electorate.

Ultimately, there is a sense that perhaps the South does not want change. If the affected parties were truly concerned with their economic and social progress they would demand the proper support from their government. However, with the lack of evidence of growth in the South, one faces the possibility that perhaps Southerners are comfortable with things the way they are.

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