



WHY DID THE DEMOCRATIC SOUTH BECOME REPUBLICAN?

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Once upon a time, every student of history – and that meant pretty much everyone with a high school education – knew this: The Democratic Party was the party of slavery and Jim Crow, and the Republican Party was the party of emancipation and racial integration.

Democrats were the Confederacy and Republicans were the Union. Jim Crow Democrats were dominant in the South and socially tolerant Republicans were dominant in the North.

But then, in the 1960s and 70s, everything supposedly flipped: suddenly the Republicans became the racists and the Democrats became the champions of civil rights.

Fabricated by left-leaning academic elites and journalists, the story went like this: Republicans couldn't win a national election by appealing to the better nature of the country; they could only win by appealing to the worst. Attributed to Richard Nixon, the media's all-purpose bad guy, this came to be known as "The Southern Strategy."

It was very simple. Win elections by winning the South. And to win the South, appeal to racists. So, the Republicans, the party of Lincoln, were to now be labeled the party of rednecks.

But this story of the two parties switching identities is a myth. In fact, it's three myths wrapped into one false narrative.

Let's take a brief look at each myth in turn.

Myth Number One: In order to be competitive in the South, Republicans started to pander to white racists in the 1960s.

Fact: Republicans actually became competitive in the South as early as 1928, when Republican Herbert Hoover won over 47 percent of the South's popular vote against Democrat Al Smith. In 1952, Republican President Dwight Eisenhower won the southern states of Tennessee, Florida and Virginia. And in 1956, he picked up Louisiana, Kentucky and West Virginia, too. And that was after he supported the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* that desegregated public schools; and after he sent the 101st Airborne to Little Rock Central High School to enforce integration.

Myth Number Two: Southern Democrats, angry with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, switched parties.

Fact: Of the 21 Democratic senators who opposed the Civil Rights Act, just one became a

Republican. The other 20 continued to be elected as Democrats, or were replaced by other Democrats. On average, those 20 seats didn't go Republican for another two-and-a-half decades.

Myth Number Three: Since the implementation of the Southern Strategy, the Republicans have dominated the South.

Fact: Richard Nixon, the man who is often credited with creating the Southern Strategy, lost the Deep South in 1968. In contrast, Democrat Jimmy Carter nearly swept the region in 1976 - 12 years after the Civil Rights Act of 1964. And in 1992, over 28 years later, Democrat Bill Clinton won Georgia, Louisiana, Arkansas, Tennessee, Kentucky and West Virginia. The truth is, Republicans didn't hold a majority of southern congressional seats until 1994, 30 years after the Civil Rights Act.

As Kevin Williamson of the National Review writes: "If southern rednecks ditched the Democrats because of a civil-rights law passed in 1964, it is strange that they waited until the late 1980s and early 1990s to do so. They say things move slower in the south -- but not that slow."

So, what really happened? Why does the South now vote overwhelmingly Republican? Because the South itself has changed. Its values have changed. The racism that once defined it, doesn't anymore. Its values today are conservative ones: pro-life, pro-gun, and pro-small government.

And here's the proof: Southern whites are far more likely to vote for a black conservative, like Senator Tim Scott of South Carolina, than a white liberal.

In short, history has moved on. Like other regions of the country, the South votes values, not skin color. The myth of the Southern Strategy is just the Democrats' excuse for losing the South, and yet another way to smear Republicans with the label "racist."

Don't buy it.

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