

Schneiderman say, “professional competence must be augmented with the subtle qualities of leadership apparently possessed also by upper-class presidents.” Still, Americans of more modest origins

may be glad to know, one of the chief justices ranked by the authors as among the very greatest, Earl Warren, rose from quite humble beginnings. He was, it seems, a true aristocrat.

Liberalism at Bay

“Race” by Thomas Byrne Edsall with Mary D. Edsall, in *The Atlantic* (May 1991), 745 Boylston St., Boston, Mass. 02116.

The Democratic Party, which has lost five of the last six presidential elections, has a serious problem—yet Democratic liberals haven’t been able to bring themselves to face it. So contend Edsall, a noted *Washington Post* political reporter, and his wife, a writer. The Democratic Party, they say, vitally needs white working-class and lower-middle-class voters. But such Americans “have been caught up in an explosive chain reaction of race, rights, values, and taxes which has propelled significant percentages of them out of the Democratic Party in presidential elections and into the ‘unreliable’ column in state and local contests.” So long as liberal Democrats respond to these defections with charges of racism, the Edsalls say, their party is doomed to defeat.

In recent decades, the Edsalls argue, a polarization of the electorate has taken place—and public policies backed by liberals have been behind it. Affirmative action, busing to achieve racial integration, and “much of the rights revolution in behalf of criminal defendants, prisoners, homosexuals, welfare recipients, and a host of other previously marginalized groups have, for many voters, converted the government from ally to adversary. The simultaneous increase . . . in crime, welfare dependency, illegitimacy, and educational failure [has] established in the minds of many voters a numbing array of ‘costs’—perceived and real—of liberalism.” Yet liberals, say the Edsalls, have had “major difficulty” even recognizing those costs.

The replacement of a liberal majority in American politics with a conservative majority, they note, involved the conversion of only about 5–10 percent of the electorate—mainly white working-class voters. Alabama Governor George Wallace, running as a third-party presidential candidate in 1968, showed the GOP how to win their support. He “defined a new right-wing populism” and portrayed the Democratic establishment as bent on imposing an unwanted liberal agenda on the American electorate.

The Democrats obliged by radically changing their party’s rules. The power to nominate presidential candidates was shifted from the state and local party orga-



This year’s battle between President George Bush and congressional Democrats over “quotas” and the “civil rights” bill underscores the importance race has assumed in American politics.

nizations, which represented blue-collar Democrats, to rights-oriented liberal reformers and other activists. Democratic presidential hopefuls since 1972 have had to woo an "artificially liberal" primary electorate. They receive "virtually no training in the kinds of accommodation and bargaining essential to general-election victory." And if recent GOP efforts to win support among affluent middle-class blacks are successful, the Democratic

Party will be further isolated as "the party of poor, underclass black America."

To regain its ability to build a winning alliance, the Edsalls say, Democratic liberalism must do what it so far has avoided doing: learn from defeat. For this to happen, in their view, the party may have to suffer even greater defeats (such as loss of control of the House and Senate) or else undergo the sort of "civil war" that Republicans endured during the 1960s.

LBJ and the Wise Men

"Serving the President: The Vietnam Years" by Clark Clifford with Richard Holbrooke, in *The New Yorker* (May 6, 13, 20, 1991), 20 West 43rd St., New York, N.Y. 10036.

On March 31, 1968, President Lyndon B. Johnson stunned the nation by announcing that he would not seek another term in the White House. The surprise came at the end of a speech in which he unveiled a limited halt to the bombing of North Vietnam and proposed peace negotiations. Was his sacrifice made in an effort to end a war that—after prodding by the fabled Wise Men of the American Establishment—he finally had come to realize could not be won? Many people then and since have thought so. But in these excerpts from his long-awaited memoirs, former Defense Secretary Clifford (1968–69) says that LBJ remained ambivalent about his objective.

"I suspect that in the inner recesses of his mind Johnson was torn between a search for an honorable exit and his desire not to be the first president to lose a foreign war," Clifford writes. "During the remainder of his presidency, he sent conflicting signals and possibly lost the opportunity . . . to end the war."

Just five days before his speech, Johnson met with former Secretary of State Dean Acheson, former Deputy Secretary of Defense Cyrus Vance, and several other pillars of the Establishment—and then, after listening to them, took Clifford and Secretary of State Dean Rusk aside and angrily asked, "Who poisoned the well with these guys?" The "poisonous" view they were advancing was that the United States should start to disengage from the war.

Contrary to later legend, Clifford says, the Wise Men were not unanimous in that view. The elder statesmen had gathered in the State Department for a dinner-party discussion of the war and formal briefings the night before their fateful meeting with LBJ. Retired generals Maxwell Taylor and Omar Bradley, former Under-Secretary of State for Political Affairs Robert Murphy, and Supreme Court Justice Abe Fortas favored pressing ahead with the war, as U.S. military commanders wanted. Most of the Wise Men, however, did favor disengagement—and what they had to say did affect Johnson. Dean Acheson, "speaking almost *ex officio* for the foreign-policy establishment . . . had an unquestionable impact on the president," Clifford writes. So did former Korean war negotiator Arthur Dean, who told Johnson that "all of us got the impression last night, listening to [the briefings], that there is no military conclusion in this war—or any military end in the near future."

Just a week earlier, when Clifford had proposed that he call the Wise Men together, the president had still thought of his planned March 31st speech "primarily as a justification for a decision to send . . . more troops [to Vietnam]." And even after LBJ met with the Wise Men, the latest draft of the speech remained "a hard-line defense of the war."

Two days before the speech, however, Johnson indicated that he was going along with a different draft, one that spoke of