

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

The Southern Shift

“The Newest Southern Politics” by Earl Black, in *The Journal of Politics* (Aug. 1998), Univ. of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Rm. 313 Hamilton Hall, CB #3265, Chapel Hill, N.C. 27599–3265.

The truly “revolutionary feature” of the 1994 election was neither the Republicans’ capture of Congress nor their much-bally-hooded Contract with America. Rather, argues Black, a political scientist at Rice University, it was the fact that Republicans won majorities of House and Senate seats in both the South and the North. Not since the early 1870s had the GOP been able to do that.

The northern politicians who created the Republican Party in the 1850s believed that with enough support from the more numerous states of the North, the party could write off the South and still control the national government. Abraham Lincoln’s election in 1860 showed that it was possible to win the presidency that way. But the Civil War intensified sectional hatreds, and after Reconstruction, the South remained a persistent problem for the Republicans, Black observes. From 1874 until 1994—for 60 consecutive elections—the Republicans never held a majority of the southern delegation in the House of Representatives. Nevertheless, because northern seats outnumbered southern ones, the GOP controlled the House in almost two-thirds of the 36 congresses between 1860 and 1930. But once the Great Depression undermined their party in the North, Republicans were reduced, for the next six decades, to a permanent minority in the House.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 changed the political landscape in the Democratic “Solid South,” Black observes. In time, “blacks joined whites as full-fledged partic-

ipants,” and many whites moved to the GOP, creating “a more competitive two-party politics.” The Republicans went over the top in 1994, as their share of southern House seats jumped from 38 percent to 51 percent, then further increased in 1996 to 57 percent (where it remained after the 1998 elections).

The chief constant in southern politics since the mid-1960s, says the author, has been black voters’ overwhelming preference for Democrats. White Democratic candidates typically enjoy a 9 to 1 advantage over white Republican rivals among black voters, and black Democratic candidates do even better. Republicans need to amass white votes to offset the black ones.

This shifting political dynamic has “dramatically transformed” the South’s delegation to the House in this decade, Black points out. In 1991, it consisted of 72 white Democrats, 39 white Republicans, and five black Democrats; six years later, after the creation of many new majority-black districts, it included 71 white Republicans, 38 white Democrats, and 16 black Democrats. In the Deep South (Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina), the transformation has been astonishing, with the number of white Democrats plummeting from 24 to four.

Ironically, Black observes, the party of Lincoln is now “heavily dependent on conservative white majorities for its success,” while the party so long identified with white supremacy has become “a vehicle for black Democrats and moderate white Democrats.”

A Wall of Separation?

“Original Unintentions: The Franchise and the Constitution” by Forrest McDonald, in *Modern Age* (Fall 1998), P.O. Box AB, College Park, Md. 20740.

Should judges interpreting the Constitution be guided by the original intentions of the Framers? Yes, says McDonald, a leading historian who teaches at the University of Alabama and is the author of *We the People: The Economic Origins of the Constitution*

(1958). Nevertheless, he warns, “the Constitution contains both more and less than is visible to the naked eye.” More, because certain features of the document “refer to previously existing institutions, constitutions, laws, and customs that are