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Throwing the Switch: Eisenhower, Stevenson and the African-American Vote in the 1956 Election

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Keywords

Politics, Republicans, Race, African-American, Vote, Eisenhower, Stevenson, 1956 Election, President, NAACP

Disciplines

African American Studies | American Politics | History | Political History | Political Science | Race and Ethnicity | Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Studies | United States History

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History Senior Thesis

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Honor Code: I affirm that I have upheld the highest principles of honesty and integrity and have not witnessed a violation of the honor code.

-Lincoln M. Fitch

Lincoln Fitch

Eisenhower Senior Seminar: Thesis

On June 1, 1956, prominent political leaders, campaign contributors, party officials and hundreds of volunteers met in Washington, D.C. for the National Citizens for Eisenhower Campaign Conference. The attendees were treated to speeches from President Dwight Eisenhower and Vice President Richard Nixon, who encouraged them to improve upon the results from 1952. Richard L. Tobin, the Director of Public Relations, on leave from the *New York Herald Tribune*, articulated the focal point of the campaign. In his address, he acknowledged that the Republican Party was “definitely a minority party,” given the Democrat’s substantial advantage in registered voters. Tobin concentrated on the ambition of the Eisenhower campaign to win more of the African-American vote which had, since 1936, gone overwhelmingly Democratic. He claimed that under Eisenhower, “more advances have been made in civil rights for the Negro than during the administration of any president except Abraham Lincoln, and the Negro voter is already beginning to be actively aware of this.” Tobin explained that Eisenhower’s Administration had abolished segregation in the military, integrated Washington, D.C., and hired more African Americans in the Foreign Service than ever before. It was important they also understand their “vested interest in the election of a Republican House and a Republican Senate.” Tobin suggested that a determined effort from volunteers would effect a modest switch in African-American vote would turn the tide of the election. “If we in Citizens could manage to persuade only 5 – 10 percent of the voting Negroes to switch from a hopeless position under the Democrats to a hopeful and logical position under the Republicans, President Eisenhower and a Republican Congress would almost certainly be elected under present circumstances.” The Republican Party believed that their record was more appealing to African Americans than it had been in over half a century.¹

¹ Robert T. Hartman, “Nixon Predicts Bigger GOP Success than ’52,” *The Los Angeles Times*, June 2, 1956; “Citizens for Eisenhower Reactivated,” *The Los Angeles Times*, January 18, 1952; Richard L. Tobin, Address to

Attracting more of the African-American vote was a central strategy of the Eisenhower campaign in 1956. The Party of Lincoln was not destroyed by the New Deal alliance, as Historian Nancy Weiss suggests. Instead, Eisenhower's first term authenticated the Republican Party's commitment to equal rights, leading to a historic escalation of support among blacks. In the 1956, the African-American vote was not a settled question; it was up for grabs. The Republicans cautiously endeavored to tip the electoral balance towards Eisenhower through persuading more African Americans to vote for them in 1956. The goal of Citizens for Eisenhower of returning blacks to the Grand Old Party was never fully realized in part because the Eisenhower's pragmatic yet progressive policies were not easily transferable to the national party nor were they absorbed by the Republican mainstream. In addition, Republicans' attempts to make inroads with southern whites, almost all of who were segregationists, undercut their commitment to civil rights and too overtly courting the black vote.²

Historiographical Introduction

Republican views of limited government power, states' rights, and reductions in social welfare were viewed as being contrary to the values of African Americans. The inability for Republicans to win African-American votes in the 1950s came down to cold political calculation and opposing political ideologies, as historian Timothy Thurber argues. He states that, "some blacks did shift their support to Eisenhower, but these percentages were inflated primarily because many African Americans did not vote at all."³ Eisenhower's success among black voters is attributed to the lack of enthusiasm for Adlai Stevenson. The change in the African-American

National Citizens for Eisenhower Campaign Conference, NAACP Papers box III: A 113 LOC.

² Nancy J. Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln: Black Politics in the Age of FDR* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press 1983).

³ Thurber Timothy, *Republicans and Race: The GOP's Frayed Relationship with African Americans* (Lawrence, KA: The University Press of Kansas, 2013), 76.

vote in 1956 is often overlooked in Eisenhower biographies. Jim Newton's *Eisenhower: The White House Years* does not mention it at all. Although many contemporaries observed Eisenhower's success among black voters, it has been a largely neglected topic by scholars. Even the only single volume work on the election of 1956, Shattuck and Thomson's *The 1956 Presidential Campaign*, does not mention anything about the grassroots Citizens for Eisenhower organization that was a major force in this campaign. Eisenhower won a historic 36% of the African-American vote in 1956, which remains the highest percentage of votes for a Republican presidential candidate since Herbert Hoover. The 1950s were a transitory period of political realignment, in which the Republicans under Eisenhower's guidance led the way in advancing equal opportunity for blacks, and at the same time they made concentrated efforts to win votes in the formerly solid Democratic South. Democrats were divided North and South between racial progressives and ultra-segregationists.⁴

Black Party Politics in 20th Century America:

Republicans allied with blacks in order to preserve the “jewel of liberty, within the family of freedom”⁵ in the wake of the Civil War, passing the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the Constitution. White “redemption and restoration” in the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s reestablished white dominance in the South and systematically disenfranchised blacks with partisan election laws, poll taxes, irregular practices and gerrymandering of districts. Under increased duress, voter participation declined precipitously. Republican support for blacks simultaneously eroded during the Progressive Era. William Howard Taft conceded in his first inaugural that black

⁴ Thurber, *Republicans and Race*; Jim Newton, *Eisenhower: The White House Years* (New York: Anchor Books, 2011), 205-222, 230-233; Frances M. Shattuck and Charles A. H. Thomson, *The 1956 Presidential Campaign* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1960).

⁵ Abraham Lincoln to Michael Hahn [Louisiana Military Governor] March 13, 1864 in *Lincoln: Speeches and Writings 1859 - 1865* ed. Roy P. Basler 3rd edition (New York: The Library of America, 1989), 579.

suffrage had not been “generally observed” and although he wished it was, he did not enforce it because he did not want “to do it more harm than good.”⁶ Segregation in the federal government and in Washington, D.C. began in the Wilson administration. Republican administration appointments to federal offices for African Americans was low, little came in the way of economic assistance to blacks in need, and no Republican president or congressmen made any serious effort in the 1920’s to ensure Negro voting rights. Meanwhile, Republican presidents were carefully working to make inroads in the South, promising not to interfere with Jim Crow. The national party was largely dormant in the South; in many cases, there were not even Republicans on the ballot. African Americans were offered little by either party in the early 20th century. However, African-Americans maintained their historic loyalty to the Republican Party. Some Republican Party leaders continued to lead the way in supporting equal rights. In 1921, in a speech in Alabama, Republican President Warren G. Harding advocated the passage of an anti-lynching law. The Negro Star headlined that “the Republican Party assures a Friendliness to Best Interests of the Race.”⁷ Despite Harding’s support, the anti-lynching bill failed in Congress. African-American voters had come to expect little from either political party.⁸

In the 1930s circumstances changed; FDR’s New Deal encouraged many blacks to move to support the Democrats in 1936. Blacks suffered immensely under the economic duress of the Great Depression. The political alliance between the Negro and Democrats was “forged in the cauldron of economic distress,” as historian Nancy Weiss writes. Under FDR the federal

⁶William Howard Taft, *The Collected Works of William Howard Taft* ed. David H. Burton (Athens OH: Ohio University Press, 2002), 53-54.

⁷“Republican Party Assures a Friendliness to Best Interest of the Race,” *The Negro Star* [Wichita, KA], October, 7, 1921.

⁸Ralph J. Bunche, *The Political Status of the Negro in the Age of FDR*, ed. Dewey W. Grantham, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 18; Edward O. Frantz, *The Door of Hope: Republican Presidents and the First Southern Strategy 1877-1933* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2011), 8-9, 17; Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008), 18-19; Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln*, 4-7.

government's policies benefited African Americans substantially. Blacks made up 20% (almost 400,000 jobs) of the WPA workforce in 1937 and they had greater access to schools through NYA assistance. The PWA spent seven million dollars on black schools in the South and provided housing, almost a third of which was earmarked for black residents. African American's support for Democrats grew because of these economic measures, not for their progressive policies on civil rights. "The two parties really stand for no fundamental programs," contemporary observer Ralph Bunche stated.⁹ FDR's administration refused, as historian Nancy Weiss writes, even "tangential association on racial causes."¹⁰ The Roosevelt administration did not support anti-poll tax or anti-lynching legislation. Nevertheless, blacks voted in droves for Roosevelt. Blacks became Roosevelt supporters before they became Democrats; throughout the 1940s, black support for Democrats was at least 10% points lower than their support for FDR. According to one study in 1936, 71% of blacks supported Roosevelt while a year later just 44% considered themselves Democrats. The Gallup Poll, in 1939, concluded that although 82% of Negroes supported Roosevelt, just 66% expressed hope that the Democrats would win the presidential election in 1940.¹¹ In the South, black voting was still low. Poll taxes, white primaries, difficult registration requirements, and physical intimidation prevented blacks from voting, despite the fact that the number of black voters grew in the 1930s to a steady trickle as they joined forces with their white southern allies in the New-Deal coalition. Given their low

⁹Bunche, *The Political Status of the Negro in the Age of FDR*, 7.

¹⁰ Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln*, 229. FDR rejected a request by the National Negro Business League for a few words for its annual meeting. Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln*, 229.

¹¹ Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln*, 253. Older blacks who remembered slavery, Reconstruction and White "Redemption" were more likely to support the Republican Party and to distrust the Democrats. Meanwhile, younger northern blacks who grew up in the era of the New Deal moved toward the Democrats en mass.

expectations for government assistance, which had ignored their civil, political, and economic issues for decades, the New Deal was a positive step for them.¹²

The Truman administration's policies solidified black support for the Democrats. In 1948, Truman sent a package of civil rights measures to Congress, including a compulsory FEPC, an anti-poll tax, and anti-lynching legislation, a commission to investigate racial issues; and a bill to end discrimination in interstate transportation, which a Republican controlled Congress did not pass. Later in 1948, he issued an executive order desegregating the military. Truman's emphatic stance for the first time made the Democratic Party the party of black civil rights. Republican allusions to their historic alliance with blacks lacked the persuasiveness of the tangible benefits that the Democrats had brought.¹³

Connections to Communism undermined the Republican Party's interest in civil rights since some of the early leaders of the civil rights movement were Communists. In the late 1940s and 1950s, Communist suspicion was rampant in the Republican Party. McCarthyism undoubtedly factored into the Republican Party's unwillingness to champion civil rights causes. Civil rights leaders who questioned the democratic process, class distinctions, or American prestige were often portrayed as unpatriotic and pro-Soviet. The USSR used racial inequality as a weapon to win supporters in the United States and in Africa, Latin America and Asia. Paradoxically, international pressure pushed both political parties towards cautious reform on race, given the embarrassment of racial inequality and the mistreatment of black Americans. The

¹² Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln*, 209-212, 229-233, 236, 251-253, 292-294 (note 85), 299; Bunche, *The Political Status of the Negro in the Age of FDR*, 18, 107,

¹³ Thurber, *Republicans and Race*, 23, 25.

Eisenhower Administration was navigating between the radical elements of the civil rights movement and advancing American prestige.¹⁴

The Republican Party in 1956:

When Eisenhower ran for President in 1952, the Republican Party was recovering from twenty years of defeat that had destroyed its dominance in the North. Voter registration of Democrats significantly outnumbered that of Republicans. The Democrats had controlled the White House for the previous twenty years and Congress for eighteen of those years.

Eisenhower campaigned nationally in 1952 attesting to his immense popularity.

The landslide victory in 1952 had, according to Ike, “ominous overtones,” since the Republican Party had far less success. Republicans had a small majority in the House and a majority of just one in the Senate. Ike worried that Republicans had not overturned the tide of Democratic domination, and Republicans remained the minority party. In 1954, the Republicans lost sixteen seats in the House, surrendering their majority to the Democrats; and they lost a handful of seats in the Senate to give the Democrats control. The midterm election of 1954, while not devastating, was a discouraging result for the party and the president.¹⁵

In Ike’s first term, he quietly distinguished himself as a leader on civil rights issues. Eisenhower brought record numbers of African Americans into all levels of government, including the White House. In 1955, he hired E. Frederic Morrow as his Assistant on Special Projects. Eisenhower believed in a limited role of the federal government—that the government should not over step its authority. With that in mind, he instituted substantial reforms: enforcing

¹⁴Gilmore; *Defying Dixie*, 10-11; Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 11-15.

¹⁵ Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change 1953-1956* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc, 1963), 428; Shattuck and Thomson, *The 1956 Presidential Campaign*, 11-13.

the desegregation of the military and desegregating the District of Columbia. He also fought discrimination in employment contracts and appointed pro civil rights judges to the Supreme Court. The President utilized the federal courts as a means to bring about reform, appointing progressive judges in the South. For the first time in American history, his administration had “erased all vestiges of segregation in all areas clearly within the authority of the Federal government,” Eisenhower boasted in a speech in Minneapolis, Minnesota on October 16, 1956.¹⁶ Ike believed that civil rights were a “simple matter of American justice.”¹⁷ Ike claimed the administration had “acted on the sound principle of talking less and doing more.”¹⁸ The policy was of one of “less oratory and more action.”¹⁹ With little fanfare, the Eisenhower administration made impressive progress within the purview of the federal government.²⁰

Eisenhower did not believe that federal authority was the primary or best way to advance civil rights. Speaking to Portia Pitman, the daughter of Booker T. Washington, he opined that “while we have to change the hearts of men, we cannot do it by cold lawmaking, but must make these changes by appealing to reason, by prayer, and by constantly working at it through our own efforts.”²¹ Eisenhower lobbied Billy Graham and other religious leaders to take the lead in making progress of racial attitudes. Eisenhower rarely addressed civil rights issues directly. He refused to comment on the Emmett Till case in 1955 and the bombing of Martin Luther King’s home in 1956. The administration ignored pressure from the African American community to pass legislation protecting voting rights. Sizing up public opinion, Republican

¹⁶Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The Public Papers of the Presidents: Dwight D. Eisenhower: 1956*, (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1958), 946.

¹⁷ Eisenhower quoted in David A. Nichols, *A Matter of Justice: Eisenhower and the Beginning of the Civil Rights Revolution* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007), 280-1.

¹⁸Eisenhower, *Public Papers of the President: 1956*, 946.

¹⁹ Eisenhower, *Public Papers of the President: 1956*, 1022.

²⁰ Nichols, *A Matter of Justice*, 74, 90.

²¹ Eisenhower meeting with Portia Washington Oct 9, 1956 quoted in E. Fredric Morrow, *Black Man in the White House: A Diary of the Eisenhower Years by the Administrative Officer for Special Projects, the White House, 1955-1961* (New York: Coward-McCann Inc., 1963), 98.

political interests in the South and the lack of political will by either party, Eisenhower was silent in the face of significant miscarriages of justice. He was a pragmatist who preferred to move quietly, slowly, and without drama. Black leaders applauded his support for black equality, but were frustrated by his gradualism. Remembering the failures of Reconstruction, the administration believed black leaders were too demanding; that rapid federal changes would not produce their desired result. In his acceptance speech for the Republican nomination, Eisenhower trumpeted that “the Republican party was created in a devout belief in equal justice and opportunity for all in a nation of free men and women.”²² Eisenhower and the Republicans were maintaining their historic support for equal opportunity for all. Eisenhower’s actions reaffirmed the Republican Party’s commitment to civil rights progress. Yet he would not press them as a matter of conscience.²³

The 1956 Campaign

In the 1956 campaign, the roles reversed from 1952. The Republicans had to persuade the people to maintain the status quo, while the Democrats had to convince the public of the need for change. In the campaign, the Democrats attacked aggressively while Republicans talked in loftier terms, seemingly above the fray. Democratic presidential nominee Adlai Stevenson criticized the Republican Party as “guided only by its devotion to the monopoly of money, to the service of the rich, and to the exploitation of the masses.”²⁴ The Stevenson tastelessly stated that the president would not survive his term, that Nixon would become president, and concentrated their attack on him. Democratic strategy was to revive the New Deal Fair-Deal coalition, and

²² Eisenhower, *Public Presidential Papers*, 710.

²³ Thurber, *Republicans and Race*, 64-69.

²⁴ Stevenson quoted in the. *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, eds. Louis Galambos and Daun Van EE (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1976), vol. 16 2156

create an “issues” campaign, focusing on issues like subsidies for farmers, the hydrogen bomb test, and health care.²⁵

In contrast, Eisenhower’s campaign focused on his record, contrasting his deeds with the Democrat’s allegedly empty words. The campaign reminded voters of the “prosperity, progress and peace” that they had experienced during the last four years. Eisenhower attempted to take foreign affairs out of the debate and to, as Malcolm Moos writes, “make Eisenhower the central issue—the Republicans sought not only a presidential triumph, but a Congressional one as well.”²⁶ The Republicans hoped to use Eisenhower’s broad-based popularity to return Republicans to the majority in the House and Senate.

A Wake up Call to a Sleeping Giant: Adlai Stevenson’s Campaign

Adlai Ewing Stevenson II, an Illinois lawyer, was the grandson of Adlai Ewing Stevenson I, who served as Grover Cleveland’s vice president from 1893 to 1897. He served in a variety of roles for the FDR and Truman administrations, including the Navy Department, State Department, and deputy UN delegate. In 1948, Stevenson won the Illinois governorship. He was renowned for his intellectual prowess and eloquent speeches. Despite his reluctance, he was drafted for the Democratic nomination in 1952. Stevenson ran with John Sparkman, an Alabama Senator and segregationist. Their campaign promised to “talk sense” to the American people and stimulate a “reasoned and precise debate” on the “great issues” of foreign policy, labor, agriculture policy, conservation, inflation, and government corruption. However, the great

²⁵Malcolm Moos, “Election of 1956,” *History of American Presidential Elections*, vol. 3 4th edition, eds. Fred Israel, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., and Fil Troy, (New York: Facts on File, 2012) 1254-1255; Jeff Broadwater, *Adlai Stevenson and American Politics: The Odyssey of a Cold War Liberal* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994), 166-167.

²⁶Malcolm Moos, “Election of 1956,” 1255.

issues campaign was never fully realized and the Democrats were swept away by voter frustration with the Truman administration and Eisenhower's popularity.²⁷

Active primary campaigning as well as support of party leader in 1956 led to Stevenson handily winning the Democratic nomination. The Democrats chose Tennessee Senator Estes Kefauver as his running mate. Stevenson then sought to recast himself in the 1956 election. The Stevenson campaign was more willing to campaign as if it were a popularity prize and less of an ideological contest. He took on a record-breaking campaign schedule of speeches, handshaking, and public events.²⁸

Reflecting Democratic division on the civil rights, Democrats in Congress circulated a manifesto opposing the Brown decision. Stevenson "cautiously disagreed," as *The Chicago Tribune* reported. Stevenson stressed that it was most important to "reduce the tensions" that had led to "shameful consequences." He asserted that differences could be "resolved through legal process." Though he disagreed with his southern friends, he refused to attack the manifesto and commended their commitment to use "legal processes only."²⁹ Stevenson was at best a moderate on civil rights. He was dedicated to a policy of "gradualism" toward integration. This policy was often unpopular among black leaders who heard it, along with Stevenson's commitment not to use troops to enforce desegregation, as a continuation of the status quo. Stevenson was striking a precarious balance between loyalty of Southern Democrats and that of blacks and liberal northerners. During the primaries, his views were challenged by Kefauver's more progressive views on civil rights. Yet in California and Florida, Stevenson ran up massive

²⁷ Kenneth S. Davis, *The Politics of Honor: A Biography of Adlai E. Stevenson* (New York: G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1957), 275-276.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 322-325, 333.

²⁹ George Tagge, "Adlai Cautious on South's Stand," *The Chicago Tribune*, March 14, 1956.

majorities among Negroes winning a 3 to 1 majority in Florida and 5 to 1 majority in California.³⁰ Despite his moderate policies, Stevenson had strong support among blacks.³¹

The Democrats recognized the long odds they faced in taking back the White House, yet believed that the president was vulnerable. They went on the attack in 1956 in both their style and amount of campaigning. Stevenson argued that the results of the midterm election was a sign that the “fog is rising, the fog of half-truths and amiable complacency — and people perceive that all is not well in Washington and the world.” Stevenson believed his campaign was “a summons to a sleeping giant.”³² They needed to awaken the electorate to the reality that a president who lacked enthusiasm in good health was now in poor health. The Republican slogan of “peace, prosperity and progress” concealed the truth. Republican prosperity, they contended, was a result of the Democratic policies of the previous two decades. Where the new administration had departed from the old there had been problems, as in agriculture. Peace was a precarious armed truce in the Cold War that they were losing. There was no progress to speak of, but rather a retreat to Ike’s moderate policies. Stevenson and the Democrats assumed that the Eisenhower “myth” was vulnerable. They argued Eisenhower had little aptitude or desire for leadership. His real talent was for misinforming the American people of reality. Stevenson went on a record-setting campaign to awaken the American people to his view of reality. Following the convention, he embarked on a 12,000 mile campaign trip even before the official campaign kickoff in Harrisburg. In that opening address he said the “central issue” of the campaign is

³⁰ These districts include San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Oakland in California and Miami in Florida. The polling data is inexact since it is analyzed by highly concentrated black areas in cities. This data though informative certainly has severe limitations.

³¹ Davis, *The Politics of Honor*, 326; Lawrence E. Davies, “Vote of Negroes Aided Stevenson” *The New York Times*, June 7, 1956; “Negroes Backed Adlai in Florida, California!: Our Leaders Warn Us. ‘Be Hard to Get in 1956’” *The Pittsburg Courier*, June 16, 1956.

³² Adlai Stevenson, “Opening Campaign Speech September 13, 1956 in Harrisburg” in Walter Johnson, ed. *The Papers of Adlai E. Stevenson: Toward a New America 1955-1957* vol. 6 (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1976), 215-220.

“whether America wants to stay on dead center, mired in complacency and cynicism; or whether it wants once more now to move forward—to meet our human needs, to make our abundance serve all of us and to make the world safer—in short, to build a New America.”³³ The Democrats in the 1956 election were fighting an uphill battle to shake the American people out of their complacency. The aggressive strategy of the Democrats seemed to be paying off, as the Republican poll numbers declined in August and September.³⁴

Stevenson worked hard in 1956. The campaign waffled in its approach between a high minded intellectual, and the more marketable aggressive one his campaign manager had devised for him. He made five policy statements of around 10,000 words, “New America” program for “Older Citizens,” “Education,” “The Nation’s Health,” “True Economics,” and “Natural Resources.” His ambitious schedule allowed him little rest and relaxation. It also hampered his ability to communicate when often his TV image was the opposite of what he wanted. He appeared tired, distracted, and harassed. His delivery was stumbling and awkward as it had never been before. Eisenhower appeared more relaxed and more energetic on TV.³⁵

Early in the campaign, both Eisenhower and Stevenson had committed to focusing their campaigns on domestic issues. However, Stevenson openly advocated two rather unpopular stances pronouncing his “end-draft” proposal and his end to testing of the Hydrogen Bomb. Ike’s thought that the “end-draft” proposal would handicap our military. Furthermore, Eisenhower said that banning Hydrogen Bomb testing would only handicap our bargaining power with the Russians, who had been committed to not negotiating on “open skies” among other U.S.

³³ Stevenson, “Opening Campaign Speech September 13, 1956 in Harrisburg” in *The Papers of Adlai E. Stevenson* vol. 6, 215-220.

³⁴ Shattuck and Thomson, *The 1956 Presidential Campaign*, 249-51; Davis, *The Politics of Honor*, 330,334-5.

³⁵ Broadwater, *Adlai Stevenson and American Politics*, 164-165; Davis, *The Politics of Honor*, 337-9.

proposals. Stevenson's challenge of Ike's defense and foreign policies were largely unpopular in the press but popular at his rallies in the northwest.³⁶

Stevenson rejected the idea that Negro voters would switch allegiances in the upcoming election. "I am confident," he stated in an interview with *Chicago Defender* reporter Ethel Payne, "that most thoughtful Negroes will continue to support the Democratic Party which has done so much to help all minority and underprivileged citizens make their most significant gains." Conversely, Republicans were cast as the party of privilege under whom the business class would gain. The Democrats had made the biggest gains for the underprivileged in regards to "civil rights, housing, social security, minimum wages, unemployment compensation and so on." Stevenson asserted that civil rights were "gravest problem we face."³⁷ Stevenson took a surprisingly bold stand in Little Rock, September 25, 1956. He declared that he believed *Brown v. Board* to be morally right, attacked segregationist sentiment and quoted with approval the Democratic platform against the use of force. Stevenson's commitment to saying the same thing in the North and South testified to his integrity. However, his unwillingness to enforce *Brown* indicated that he would not challenge southern segregationist practices. By contrast, Eisenhower did not mention the desegregation problem during his tour of the South.³⁸

Stevenson and Kefauver faced an immense challenge on civil rights from within their own party. Republican propaganda sought to tie all Democrats to the radical segregationists. The moderate progressive editor of the *Raleigh, News and Observer*, Jonathan Daniels, wrote that Stevenson must "avoid like the plague the impression that you are the best loved candidate of the Southern politicians. . . . Some of those who most loudly love you are heading programs in

³⁶ Davis, *The Politics of Honor*, 340-1; Broadwater, *Adlai Stevenson and American Politics*, 169.

³⁷ Ethel Payne, "Adlai Says Negro Voters Won't Shift in Election," *The Chicago Defender*, August 11, 1956.

³⁸ Shattuck and Thomson, *1956 Presidential Campaign*, 258; Davis, *The Politics of Honor*, 340

the South which are repulsive to thousands of voters in crucial areas in the nation.”³⁹ The support prominent segregationist Democrats like Eastland, Tallmadge, and Thurmond would certainly cost him votes of progressive Northerners and Blacks. Stevenson responded, “I know the pitfalls up here from too much Deep South affection. I had not been aware that there was that much—unless it was in N.C. but I’m glad you warned me.” Stevenson was delicately trying to stay in the balance between the radicals at both ends of his party. He continued, “up here the sensible Negro leaders don’t really expect miracles; all they really insist upon is some honest progress in the resistance areas.” Stevenson was asserting that his moderate gradualist policies were accepted by northern blacks. “As for the campaign, I’ll try to go on saying what I have for eight months. And while denying the virtues or efficacy of force, I’ll proclaim the necessity of law observance.”⁴⁰ Both candidates vaguely advocated the advancement of justice and equal opportunity. Stevenson was more willing to confront issues rhetorically, whereas Eisenhower was more willing to take more substantive actions.

Both Eisenhower and Stevenson sought to woo Harlem, which *The Chicago Tribune* called “symbolic of the Negro vote.” In a speech to a crowd estimated at around 15,000 on October 4, Stevenson aggressively attacked Ike for his failure to support *Brown v. Board*. Furthermore he lambasted the “misrepresentation” of Ike’s record which, he believed, unfairly claimed to have desegregated in the armed forces and desegregated in D.C.⁴¹ Recasting the civil rights accomplishments of the Eisenhower administration as the natural continuation of Democratic policies, Stevenson accused Ike of “trying to run on the Democratic record.”⁴² Then

³⁹ Stevenson to Jonathan Daniels, September 1, 1956, The Papers of Adlai E. Stevenson, VI, 206-7.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ “Adlai Assails G.O.P. Claims on Civil Right,” *The Chicago Tribune*, October 5, 1956. Using Eisenhower’s testimony, from before he was president, that desegregation of the military was a bad idea and his statement in the fall of 1952 that no more segregation existed Stevenson sought to reclaim this accomplishment for the Democrats.

⁴² Ibid.

he exalted his civil rights record, noting that as governor of Illinois he desegregated the National Guard, protected citizens in the Cicero riots, and almost passed a fair employment practices act. Stevenson exaggerated his commitment to civil rights without offering substantive change. The presidential candidates had almost no substantive debate on how to advance civil rights issues. They were largely in agreement that it was the role of the courts to adjudicate those issues. Although Ike left the use of federal troops on the table he was unwilling to advocate that policy. Stevenson and Eisenhower fought over the past of civil rights reform more than they fought over the future. *The Chicago Defender* admitted in its endorsement of Stevenson that “both major parties and presidential candidates leave much to be desired.”⁴³

Eisenhower Campaign Strategy: “Trying to Flip the Switch”

Eisenhower deliberately took on a limited campaigning schedule. Yet Eisenhower’s campaign team fought vigorously not merely for his reelection, but to attain a national mandate and sweep in a Republican Congress holding on his coat tails. The campaigning strategy had three facets: firstly campaigning by Richard Nixon, an extensive grassroots organization, and extensive usage of television. Nixon toured the country speaking on the Republican slogan of “peace, prosperity, and progress.” He covered more than 15,000 miles, 32 states, 14 working days, including every politically important state. His stump speech highlighted the way in which that slogan was true: more jobs, more pay, and farm prices up, honesty in government, out of Korea. His speech was a foil to the “corruption, communism and Korea” under Truman.⁴⁴

⁴³ Adlai E. Stevenson Speech in NYC, October 4, 1956, *The Papers of Adlai E. Stevenson* vol. 6, 253-257; “Adlai Assails G.O.P. Claim on Civil Rights,” *The Chicago Tribune*, October 5, 1956; Broadwater, *Adlai Stevenson and American Politics*, 168; “Negro Paper Picks Side: *Chicago Defender* Announces Endorsement of Stevenson,” *The New York Times*, October 15, 1956.

⁴⁴ Shattuck and Thomson, *The 1956 Presidential Campaign*, 247-8 note 6.

Secure in his polling numbers and his belief in new technology bucked the tradition of the whirlwind whistle-stop campaign in favor of a national television campaign, Eisenhower, in contrast to Stevenson, became a “television candidate.” He greatly limited his face-to-face campaigning and utilized this growing form of media. He used this medium to brand himself and project his image to the American people. Eisenhower preferred the campaign style of 1956. He wrote to a friend that “I find the business of relying on the record of the Administration much less distasteful than I did the type of campaign we had to wage in 1952. I am proud of what we have done, while at the same time I am the first to admit there are a great many problems to be talked.”⁴⁵ Ike began his campaign with a series of televised speeches that sought to elevate him above political barb trading. While Eisenhower himself was not actively campaigning, Nixon, the party, and Citizens were actively working on his behalf.⁴⁶

Eisenhower’s campaign featured a grassroots organization called National Citizens for Eisenhower and Nixon. Citizens was an extra-party, personality-centered organization that was related to but not controlled by the Republican Party. Citizens encouraged political activism on behalf of Eisenhower, especially from Democrats and Independents, much as it had done so successfully in 1952. Citizens created clubs across the country that hosted dinners, coffee hours, and other events that brought people together to support the president. In addition, they raised money for the campaign, oversaw TV commercials, created mountains of advertisements, and organized voter registration drives. Historian Robert Mason describes Citizens as an “innovative” and “promising force” that was at times at odds with the party establishment. This was a moderate political group that attempted to appeal to moderates and Democrats to join the

⁴⁵ Dwight David Eisenhower to Virgil M. Pinkley, October 13, 1956 in *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower* vol. 16, ed. Louis Galambos and Daun Van EE (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1996), 2326.

⁴⁶ Craig Allen, “Eisenhower’s Congressional Defeat of 1956: Limitations of Television and the GOP” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 22 no. 1 (winter, 1992), 57-71; Shattuck and Thomson, *The 1956 Presidential Election*, 248-249.

Eisenhower faithful. Citizens for Eisenhower and Nixon capitalized on Ike's popularity and moderate policies in winning votes from Independents and Democrats. Citizens campaign materials focused on Eisenhower rather than on the Republican Party in general, especially in the South. Citizens struggled to get those voters into the Republican Party fold.⁴⁷

Following Richard Tobin's speech at the National Citizens for Eisenhower Campaign Conference, Citizens made attracting the Negro vote one of its top priorities. The organization's leaders hired numerous African Americans in an effort to appeal to the black community. In June, 1956, *The Pittsburgh Courier*⁴⁸ writer Stanley Roberts was hired as special assistant to the PR Director Richard Tobin to "develop basic campaign literature regarding the Negro voter."⁴⁹ Citizens had a diverse staff of volunteers and fulltime employees which it advertised in *The Pittsburgh Courier*.⁵⁰ Citizens focused particularly on winning the black vote in key northern cities where their vote might make the difference for Republican Congressmen. Citizens, along with Republican leadership, hoped to use Eisenhower's appeal to "establish a new pattern" in order to bring about a "new Republican era," James Reston of the *New York Times* wrote.⁵¹ In order to win their vote, the Eisenhower Administration sought to "represent itself as the forthright champion of civil rights legislation."⁵²

Citizens for Eisenhower and the Republican Party made it their campaign goal to make inroads with the African-American community. *The New York Times* reported that the GOP was looking to "dramatize the Negro campaign for public school integration; it might be able to

⁴⁷ Robert Mason, "Citizens for Eisenhower and the Republican Party, 1951-1965" *The Historical Journal*, 56 no. 2 (2013) 513, 522, 528, 53.

⁴⁸ "New Aid Named by the Eisenhower Citizens Group," *The Los Angeles Times*, June 11, 1956. *The Pittsburgh Courier* was the largest Negro weekly in the country.

⁴⁹ "New Aid Named by the Eisenhower Citizens Group," *The Los Angeles Times*, June 11, 1956.

⁵⁰ "This is the Friend: Citizens for Eisenhower is Leading the Way!" *The Pittsburgh Courier*, October 20, 1956.

⁵¹ James Reston, "G.O.P. Maps Drive for Negro Votes," *The New York Times*, June 4, 1956.

⁵² Emmett E. Dorsey, "GOP and the Negro Vote," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, Aug 18, 1956

establish a pattern of mass voting in the decisive populous states of the North.”⁵³ The Republicans created a \$250,000 war chest, the most they had ever spent to win black invested. They targeted fourteen crucial states and 61 key Congressional races where Negroes might provide the decisive vote.⁵⁴ The campaign strategized that if it could sway even a small percentage of black voters it would be enough to hold the White House, swing Congress, and reestablish the Republicans as the dominant party in the North. In this effort Citizens for Eisenhower distributed a pamphlet titled “The Big Switch—An Analysis of the Vote of Negro Citizens.” This pamphlet encouraged Citizens volunteers to “get the facts and philosophy of our President before as many of them as possible.” They believed by educating blacks about Eisenhower’s record they would orchestrate a “Big Switch” that election year. It was the job of Citizens to “throw this switch and get the great Negro train off the siding and onto the Main Line where it can speed forward, securely coupled to the Eisenhower Express!”⁵⁵

To that end the GOP and Citizens sought the endorsements of black newspapers, politicians, minister, civil leaders, and celebrities. The Negro press went overwhelmingly for Ike. Of the top ten black newspapers in the nation, only the *Chicago Defender* supported Stevenson. *The Pittsburgh Courier*, *The New York-Amsterdam News*, and *The Atlanta Daily World* all backed Ike. In addition, Republicans planned to “send headlining Negro speakers on whirlwind trips to key cities throughout the nation,” *Jet* reported.⁵⁶ Among them were famous black leaders like Nat King Cole and Mrs. Crystal Byrd Fausset—the first black woman to be elected to the Pennsylvania State Legislature as a Democrat. Ms., Dr . T. R. M. Howard,

⁵³ James Reston, “GOP maps drive for Negro Votes,” *The New York Times* June, 4, 1956.

⁵⁴ “Ticker Tape U.S.A.” *Jet* 11 no. 2 (November, 15, 1956): microform in Newspaper and Periodical Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. After the election it is estimated that \$200,000 was actually spent. This is still a historic high for the Republicans;

⁵⁵ “Targets for GOP Drive,” *The New York Times*, June, 4, 1956 in the NAACP Papers box IX: 38, LOC; “GOP Plans 250,000 Campaign on Civil Rights,” *Jet* 10, no. 17 (August 30, 1956): microform in LOC; Pamphlet in NAACP Papers, box III: A113, LOC.

⁵⁶ “GOP Plans 250,000 Campaign Civil Rights,” *Jet* 10, no. 17 (August 30, 1956): microform in LOC.

president of the National Medical Association (a black medical group), and Adam Clayton Powell, Harlem's Democratic Congressmen. Leading figures in the African American community were leaving the Democratic Party and became a crucial voice in stumping for Eisenhower.⁵⁷

Similarly, the campaign sought to win votes by widely disseminating their cause to black voters. They created "millions of pamphlets assailing the Dixie influence" on the Democratic Party. In addition they created pamphlets extoling Ike's record on civil rights and reminding them of the party's historic commitment to civil rights. One pamphlet titled, "Abe and Ike: in Deed Alike" argued that Ike had done more for African Americans than any President since Lincoln.⁵⁸

Although Citizens eagerly went after the Negro vote, the RNC was more hesitant to do so directly. White House Aide E. Frederic Morrow wrote on October 1, 1956, "the polls are very discouraging," because they showed "a steady decline" from 1952 and "crucial states ... are still in the doubtful column." Furthermore, "the key role in this whole picture will be played by Negro voters, and every poll indicates that 90 percent of them are Democrats." This was odd, given Eisenhower's "remarkable record" in civil rights. Furthermore Morrow was disturbed that, "Republican leaders have written off the Negro vote." He noted that "little or no money is being spent in Negro areas and those who have volunteered to try to line up Negro voters are disgusted with the lack of support ... from Republican headquarters."⁵⁹ As Morrow indicated, the Party of Lincoln faced an uphill battle in making inroads in the African-American vote. A Gallup Poll

⁵⁷ "Negro Press for G.O.P." *New York Times*, November 4, 1956; Ad "This is the Friend: Citizens for Eisenhower is Leading the Way!" *The Pittsburg Courier*, October 20, 1956; "GOP Rounding Up Big-Name Negro Leaders of U.S." *The Pittsburg Courier*, September 1, 1956; "State G.O.P. Maps Negro Vote Drive" *The New York Times*, September 2, 1956.

⁵⁸ "GOP Plans 250,000 Campaign on Civil Rights" *Jet* 10, no. 17 (August 30, 1956): microform in LOC; "Abe and Ike: In Deed Alike" box 1913A, Irving Papers, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY found in Thurber, *Republicans and Race*, 75.

⁵⁹ Morrow, *Black Man in the White House*, 95.

released on August 5 found that while 67% of Negroes believed that Democrats had done the most for them in the last ten years, just 16% believed Republicans had done more. When asked “which party would rather you like to see win in this state?” 74% said Democrats and just 21% said Republicans. Eisenhower fared better than his party, with 32% of Northern Negroes hoping he would win, compared to 62% for Stevenson. In the early part of the campaign Eisenhower had seemingly made small inroads but Democrats were still dominant.⁶⁰

Eisenhower’s national campaign in 1956 avoided direct confrontation with the divisive issue of race. He campaigned upon a belief in “equal opportunity” and had demonstrated his willingness to utilize federal power, where it was authorized, to advance civil rights. The challenge was to avoid the extremists on both sides of the issue. He believed that “an ounce of leadership is worth a pound of law.”⁶¹ Eisenhower thought subtle non-confrontational tactics could bring about a gradually progressive action on behalf of civil rights. In 1952, Eisenhower campaigned on 14 promises on civil rights, all of which he had instituted by 1956. His campaign portrayed Ike as a man of action on civil rights in contrast to the Democrats empty platitudes.

Yet Eisenhower almost never took a strong public stand against the infringement upon black civil liberties. Evangelist Billy Graham wrote to Eisenhower that he was disturbed by “rumors” that Republicans were planning to “go all out” in an attempt to win the “Negro vote in the North regardless of the South’s feelings.” Graham cautioned Ike about jeopardizing the “amazing degree [to which] you have the confidence of white and Negro leaders.”⁶² Eisenhower was carefully trying to grow his support among whites and blacks. This undermined Republican out to the black community. E. Frederic Morrow was frequently mistreated on the campaign

⁶⁰ George H. Gallup “Semi-Final Election Analysis,” *The Gallup Poll Public Opinion 1935-1971* vol. 2, (New York: Random House, 1972), 1438-9.

⁶¹ Eisenhower quoted in Thurber, *Republican and Race*, 45.

⁶² Billy Graham to Dwight D. Eisenhower quoted in *The Presidential Papers of Eisenhower* vol. 16, 2190 note 3.

trail. He was often at the last minute asked to shorten his speeches as if the Republicans were ashamed of him. Morrow reflected that “neither the White House nor the party has done very much to build me up.”⁶³ The Republicans and Eisenhower were half-heartedly attempting to make inroads with blacks, but also to win the votes of white Southerners.

In the final phase of the campaign Citizens, the party, and Eisenhower fought with a greater vigor. The president “has finally come out, swinging both fists against his opponent,” Morrow observed. Citizens made a rigorous effort to rally Negro leaders to Eisenhower. Citizens, who already had 450 precinct leaders, expanded its operations in Chicago by opening two more headquarters. Vice President Nixon and Adam Clayton Powell made speeches to black audiences attacking the Democrats. Nixon said that Adlai Stevenson is “the candidate of a divided party with one half paying tribute to the cause of equality of opportunity and the other half being dead set against it.”⁶⁴ This late term push was valuable, as Morrow says; “the concentrated effort we made in the last few days of the campaign paid off. I also feel that the fact that a great many prominent ministers came out for Ike reassured Negroes”⁶⁵ Political maverick and black Democratic congressman Adam Clayton Powell was a major part of this push.⁶⁶

Adam Clayton Powell: An Eisenhower Advocate

Eisenhower’s actions on behalf of African Americans made him increasingly popular among black leaders. In 1952 Harlem Congressman Adam Clayton Powell supported Adlai Stevenson for president. He felt Eisenhower “did not have time” to answer his questions on the number one domestic issue: civil rights. He, along with some other black leaders, resented Ike’s

⁶³ Morrow, *Black Man in the White House*, 99-101.

⁶⁴ Ethel L. Payne, “Powell, Nixon in Bid to Gain Chicago Votes,” *Chicago Defender*, October 29, 1956.

⁶⁵ Morrow, *Black Man in the White House*, 106-107.

⁶⁶ Robert Howard, “Negro Democratic Vote Break Seen by Ike Group,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 30, 1956; Payne, “Powell, Nixon in Bid to Gain Chicago Votes,” *Chicago Defender*, October 29, 1956.

“say-nothing, do-nothing, think-nothing attitude on civil rights.”⁶⁷ Powell and the Eisenhower were seemingly at loggerhead ideologically. Powell believed wholeheartedly that the government needed to take an activist stance in advancing and protecting the Negro, while Eisenhower supported gradual civil rights within the preexisting power of the federal government. Powell pressed the new administration for reform, especially on FEPC legislation, and later by attacking Ike’s Cabinet officers as not enforcing the president’s will. Despite the public prodding, the Eisenhower administration and Powell developed a mutually beneficial political partnership. Powell met frequently with White House aide Maxwell Rabb to share instances of civil rights abuses in the federal government and to urge the government for stronger action. Rabb shared with Powell Ike’s news items and speeches that showed his desire for equal justice.⁶⁸ Powell’s prodding pushed the Eisenhower administration to ensure that desegregation in federal government was accomplished. The congressmen praised the president’s record on Civil Rights reform in an article in the *Readers Digest* in October 1954. Eisenhower’s actions in hiring blacks, enforcing the desegregation of the military desegregating D.C., and abiding by the no discrimination clause in government contracts had, Powell said, “without friction,” with an “absence of publicity,” and with a knack for “quiet persuasion,” brought about a “silent revolution” in establishing equality.⁶⁹ Division between them over their divergent responses to the rulings on *Brown v. Board* and the Emmett Till murder complicated their partnership. Although pleased with Eisenhower’s success, Powell remained unsatisfied, and in early 1956, derided Republicans and Democrats with intransigence on civil rights.

⁶⁷Adam Clayton Powell, *Adam by Adam: The Autobiography of Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.* (New York: The Dial Press, 1971), 86.

⁶⁸Charles V. Hamilton, *Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.: The Political Biography of an American Dilemma* (New York: Atheneum Books, 1991), 199-203, 206

⁶⁹ Adam Clayton Powell Jr., “The President and the Negro,” *The Reader’s Digest*, vol 65, 1954, 61-64.

Powell became increasingly frustrated with Democratic dithering on civil rights as 1956 wore on. “Stevenson in 1956 was not the Stevenson of 1952,” he wrote. Stevenson and Powell had met in 1952 and revised the Democratic platform on civil rights, after which Powell supported Stevenson enthusiastically. In 1956, however, the Democratic platform largely neglected civil rights and Powell was refused an audience with Stevenson. Powell maintained that he “could not campaign for Stevenson in 1956 unless he reassured me and the American people that his stand on civil rights was as forthright as it had been in 1952.”⁷⁰ The Republican plank on civil rights was a shade stronger. Yet the congressmen was unsatisfied, calling both “not worth a tinker’s damn.”⁷¹ On October 11, 1956, Eisenhower summoned Powell to the White House. Powell pressed for executive and congressional support for an omnibus civil-rights bill. With Ike’s support the congressmen put his full weight behind the Eisenhower campaign. He formed the Independent Democrats for Eisenhower (IDE) and stumped for the Republican national ticket across northern cities, especially his native Harlem in the 1956. Powell, speaking in the Democratic stronghold of Newark, to 300 Negro voters, challenged them to “stop being a rubber stamp” to show the Republican’s and Democrats that they “don’t have the colored vote in their pocket.” Finally he listed Ike’s responsiveness when Powell called his attention to segregated areas in the federal government.⁷² Inspired by Powell’s activism, the black vote for Eisenhower in Harlem doubled 1956.⁷³

Adam Clayton Powell was a political maverick who worked with the Eisenhower administration on issues, where they agreed. Their partnership on civil rights led to a political alliance that helped boost Powell’s national status and helped Eisenhower, though not the

⁷⁰Powell, *Adam by Adam*, 129.

⁷¹ Powell in *The Washington Afro-American*, October 27, 1956, NAACP Papers box IX: 38 LOC.

⁷² *The Washington Afro-American*, October 27, 1956 in NAACP Papers box IX: 38.

⁷³Powell, *Adam by Adam* 91-93, 130; Hamilton, *Adam Clayton Powell*, 264, 266, 275; Nichols, *A Matter of Justice*, 138.

Republicans, make inroads with black voters. Adam Clayton Powell was the leading figure of an increasingly disaffected black electorate.⁷⁴

Disillusioned Democrats

Disaffection between black leadership and the Democratic Party continued to grow. In September 1955, Roy Wilkins, Executive Secretary of the NAACP, wrote an open letter to the chairman of the DNC, decrying the campaign to deny African Americans the right to vote in Mississippi. Black voters were bullied by death threats, forced withdrawals, several murders, and the “State Democratic Organization issued statements indicating it was challenging every vote cast by a Negro.” *The Los Angeles Times* opined that “here is the first open and armed expression of the Democrats from the NAACP in some time.” Republicans saw “a growing disaffection with the Democratic Party and swing towards Eisenhower when he runs for reelection.”⁷⁵

In many cases, the extreme views of southern Democrats pushed African Americans away from voting for Stevenson. Three black leaders authored editorials in the *Pittsburgh Courier* advising African Americans to vote for Ike. A bishop from the AME church wrote, “The fancy language of Stevenson cannot drown the menacing voice of [Herman] Talmadge.” He concluded that “negroes should vote Republican to show their appreciation of steps taken for their advancement by the executive branch of the government.”⁷⁶ Blacks had become disaffected with the division within the Democratic Party. Democratic control of the Senate led to the ultra-

⁷⁴ “Adam Powell faces Ouster by Democrats,” and “Fire 2 Adam Powell Appointees in Washington,” *Jet* 11, no. 4 (November 29, 1956): microform in LOC; Hamilton, *Adam Clayton Powell Jr.*, 291-292; Nichols, *A Matter of Justice*, 141. Ultimately this political alliance turned sour for Powell. After the 1956 election Powell was ousted from his senior position as the number two member on the House committee of education. Two of Powell’s civil service appointees, both black, were fired by the Democrats in November 1956. In addition, the heightening tensions on civil rights issues led to a division between Powell and the administration early in January 1958.

⁷⁵ John Jasper, “Republicans See Swing of Vote to Eisenhower in 1956: Dawson-Townsend Split in Illinois, NAACP-New Deal alliance ends,” *The Baltimore Afro-American*, September 17, 1955.

⁷⁶ P. L. Pratts, “How Should the Negro vote?” *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 6, 1956.

segregationist James Eastland of Mississippi becoming Chair of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary. A vote for the Democrats was a vote “to make Eastland and the race-baiters chairmen of important committees in congress.”⁷⁷ The campaign attempted to put local and state elections in a national context. The Republicans attempted to use the segregation issue to sink Democratic support among African Americans. In April of 1956, *the Wall Street Journal* reported that a New York City doctor said that, “Northern Democrats were powerless to move on civil rights. They’re boxed in by southerners.” Blacks were increasingly disaffected by their “inaction on civil rights.” This was leading a transformation, as “for the first time in two decades many Negro voters are bolting the Democratic camp in favor of Republicans.” These voters were primarily younger voters led by African American leaders. Democrats unofficially admitted trouble: “I certainly don’t think we can take the Negro vote for granted this year,” and official of the party’s national committee.⁷⁸ A Gallup Poll between October 1952 and September 1956 concluded that Democrats strength among African Americans had declined from 72% to 56%. The African-American vote was up for grabs.⁷⁹

Election Results: The Southern Switch

Eisenhower’s campaign and civil rights record led to considerable inroads with black voters. *The Gallup Poll’s* “semi-final election analysis” released on November 4, 1956, concluded that Eisenhower had gained 21% among Negro voters compared to his 1952 numbers,

⁷⁷ Flyer from National Citizens from Eisenhower and Nixon, NAACP Papers box III: A113, LOC.

⁷⁸ Allan L. Otten “The Negro Vote: Many Voters Show Signs of Returning to GOP Ranks,” *The Wall Street Journal* April 13, 1956, in NAACP Papers box IX: 38 LOC.

⁷⁹ RNC papers, Part II, “Major Findings in Political Polls,” Aug 6-Sept 12, 1956 microform in LOC.

from 21% to 42%. Samuel Lubell analyzed the voting returns in Negro wards from 86 cities, nearly one million voters. He concluded that Eisenhower won 36 percent of the black vote.⁸⁰

Moses Rischin, a contemporary historian wrote in his analysis of the election that, “for the first time in twenty years, Negroes returned to the Republican party in considerable numbers.”⁸¹

Jet's election summary was titled “Why Negroes Switched to Ike.” *Jet* sought to explain the causes to its readers of what was and observable fact, the black vote had shifted.⁸²

Democratic incoherence on civil rights had clearly cost them amongst African-American voters. They had surrendered the initiative the Republicans whose small steps of progress toward civil rights looked large by comparison. Malcolm Moos writes that “Stevenson’s equivocations on civil rights undoubtedly disenchanted some elements of the Democratic black vote and cost him important newspaper support.”⁸³ The startling lack of support from black newspapers and leaders indicates a significant shift in 1956 towards support for the Republican Presidential candidate. African Americans in 1956 communicated their disaffection with the Democratic Party by abstaining from voting. The RNC research division concluded that Eisenhower’s 8.7% improvement in ten northern cities was primarily the result of 119,000 fewer votes for Stevenson. Historian Timothy Thurber suggests that this undermined the campaign success, which he views as largely insignificant. On the contrary, the Republicans ran a

⁸⁰ “Negroes Returning to the G.O.P.,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 14, 1956. Samuel Lubell was a political pollster and public opinion analyst who used extensive research in the form of personal interviews and voting data analysis to make arguments about voting trends. The voting data for blacks was confined to analysis of heavily black precincts where most blacks lived and where their voting was least threatened.

⁸¹ Moses Rischin, *“Our Own Kind”: Voting by Race, Creed or National Origin, A Report to the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions* (Santa Barbara, CA: The Fund for the Republic, 1960), 28-33. Rischin analyzed the voting data in prominently black wards.

⁸² Gallup “Semi-Final Election Analysis” *The Gallup Poll*, 1453; Samuel Lubell, “The Future of the Negro Voter in the United States,” *Journal of Negro Education* 26 no. 3 (Summer, 1957), 408; “Why Negroes Switched to Ike,” *Jet* 11 no. 3 (November 22, 1956): microform in LOC.

⁸³ Moos, “Election of 1956,” *History of American Presidential Elections*, 1255.

campaign to disenchant blacks with the Democratic Party. Declining voter turnout indicates the success of that campaign and the growing frustration of blacks with the Democratic Party.⁸⁴

Chairmen of the NAACP Roy Wilkins wrote that, “there are signs that the enchantment that the Democrats exercised over the Negro is wearing off.” This disenchantment was not universal. Wilkins continued, “The election of last November proved that the Negro voter was highly selective in indicating his dissatisfaction, for while he rebuked the Democrats nationally, he stayed with them on the levels where they had proved themselves, either individually or in area politics, to be his friends.”⁸⁵ Historians of the 1956 election, Thomson and Shattuck, wrote that ticket splitting was “the dominant feature of the 1956 electoral result.”⁸⁶ In 105 districts where Republicans were on the ballot, voters went for Eisenhower but chose Democratic representatives.⁸⁷ Eisenhower won more votes than 82% of Republican congressional candidates. The president persuaded Democrats and Independents to vote for him but not for Republican Party. Just two of the six Republican senators Eisenhower supported won their races. However, in Kentucky, the Negro shift made the difference. Thruston Morton—“profiting from disaffection in Democratic ranks and a shift among Negro voters”—won the Senate seat in Kentucky by a mere 5,000 votes.⁸⁸ Ike’s record as a civil rights reformer and his grassroots campaign made significant headway with Negro voters that in some cases made the difference

⁸⁴Thurber, *Republicans and Race*, 76-77.

⁸⁵Roy Wilkins, “The Future of the Negro Voter in the United States,” *Journal of Negro Education* 26 no. 3, (Summer, 1957), 424-43.

⁸⁶ Shattuck and Thomson, *The 1956 Presidential Campaign*, 359.

⁸⁷Thurber, *Republicans and Race*, 77; Shattuck and Thomson, *The 1956 Presidential Campaign*, 359. In much of the South the Republican Party was feeble. In 22 districts they did not even run a congressional candidate. Thurber, *Republicans and Race*, 77; Shattuck and Thomson, *The 1956 Presidential Campaign*, 359.

⁸⁸ Shattuck and Thomson, *The 1956 Presidential Campaign*, 358.

for Republican legislators.⁸⁹ However, he was not as successful in persuading them that to support the Republican Party was in their best interest.⁹⁰

Reporter Richard Lyons of *The Washington Post* concluded that, in all the cities they studied, Ike won a greater percentage of the black vote than he did in 1952. The biggest impact of the Negro switch was felt in the South. In some northern cities the change was “hardly measurable” and the “overriding issue was civil rights.” African Americans switched in far greater numbers in the South because southern Democrats were opposed to civil rights, whereas in the North they were generally for it. Lyons argued that “Negroes can take credit for holding Tennessee for President Eisenhower. Their switches in Memphis alone were far more than his statewide margin.” Samuel Lubell concluded that “in the northern cities Eisenhower’s gain over 1952 was 8 percent while in the South the same Southern Negro wards and precincts which gave Eisenhower 19 percent of their vote in 1952 gave him 47 per cent in 1956.”⁹¹ Black leaders in the South explained that blacks switched because of the need for a two party system, Ike’s record, resentment against southern segregationists, and greater confidence in Eisenhower as a military leader. George Lee, a black GOP leader and insurance salesman in Memphis, Tennessee asserted that Eisenhower “listed the Negro closer to first-class citizenship than any president since Abraham Lincoln.”⁹² Conversely, African Americans in the North were skeptical of Eisenhower’s commitment to economic justice. They voted in large part with the Democrats because of the improvements the New Deal had wrought for them and future economic aid benefits Stevenson promised. To them, the Republicans were still the party of big business.

⁸⁹ Moses Rischin wrote that “Richmond Negroes gave almost as many votes to the Republican Congressional Candidate as to the President.” In his analysis of several other southern cities made similar conclusions. Rischin, *“Our Own Kind” Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions*, 35.

⁹⁰ Shattuck and Thomson, *The 1956 Presidential Campaign*, 355, 357-359.

⁹¹ Richard L. Lyons, “Big Impact of Negro Vote Switch Was in South,” *The Washington Post*, Nov 18, 1956.

⁹² “Southern Opinions on Ike Switch,” *Jet* 11 no. 3 (November 22, 1956): microform in LOC.

Lubell wrote that they were divided “between their anger over incidents of racial violence in the South and the economic attachment they feel to the Democratic Party.” However, even a marginal eight percent increase among northern black was still a success for Citizens.⁹³

Republican gains were limited; Roy Wilkins wrote, they “demonstrated their ineptitude in expanding their gains.” Eisenhower’s pragmatic and political commitment to steady progress on civil rights did not satisfy black voters. Furthermore, neither party was comfortable in overtly addressing civil rights issues. Wilkins criticized, “they can add to their advances if they will cease acting as though they were ashamed to be forthright on the issues, one of which is the right to vote.”⁹⁴ E. Frederic Morrow echoed similar sentiments, stating that White House and RNC efforts to recruit black support “all along [were] lukewarm.” He suggests that Republicans believed blacks were indebted to the party of Lincoln. Morrow believed that Republicans should have treated blacks as normal citizens.⁹⁵ The Republican Party and the Eisenhower Administration were reluctant to go after the black vote because they wanted to campaign nationally as the party of consensus and they wanted to make inroads with southern whites. The Citizens for Eisenhower made a concerted effort, but lacking the full support of the Republican party, they could not bring about a major political shift in the black vote. The Eisenhower and the Republican’s political calculations prevented them from fully restoring the perception that it was the party of civil rights.

⁹³Lubell, “The Future of the Negro Voter in the United States,” *Journal of Negro Education*, 408.

⁹⁴Wilkins, “The Future of the Negro Voter in the United States,” *Journal of Negro Education*, 428.

⁹⁵E. Frederic Morrow, interview by Thomas Soapes, February 23, 1977, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, KA [Accessed online].

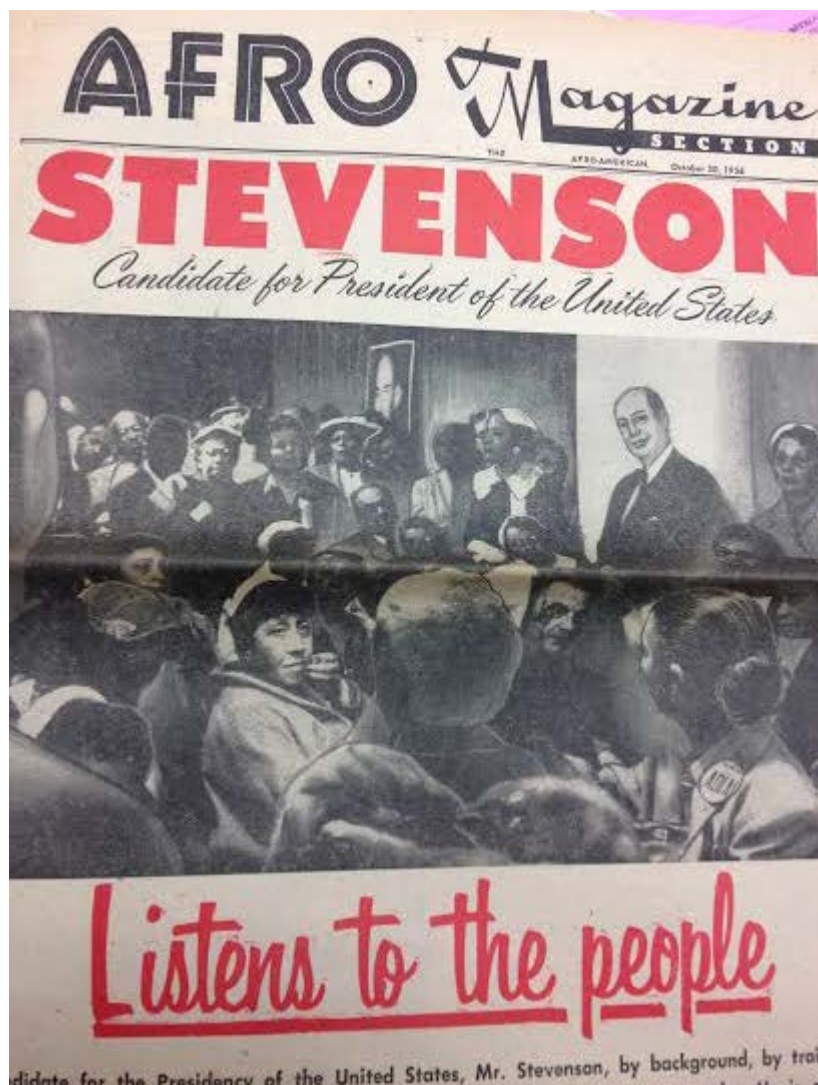
The Significance of the Switch

Eisenhower's unique campaign organization, his record of supporting civil rights, his disaffection with democratic intransigence, and his popular appeal led him to his success amongst African Americans, which helped him win an overwhelming victory in 1956. His mass appeal was unable to draw Negro voters into the Republican Party either for congressional elections in 1956 or for the long term. Eisenhower's overwhelming national victory and his substantial gains were indicative of the popularity of his person and policies, but not his party. The Republican Party would lose on the national level. Eisenhower was the first president since Zachary Taylor to be elected without winning control of either the House or the Senate. Eisenhower's popularity was not able to transfer to his party. "I readily admit that the public in general does not believe that my own convictions are yet largely characteristic of the Republican Party as a whole," Ike wrote to Anthony Parshley, an Episcopal Priest, after the election.⁹⁶ This was markedly true for African Americans. *Jet* reasoned that blacks "favored Eisenhower as a personality rather than as head of the GOP."⁹⁷ Despite its limitation, Eisenhower's campaign was able to flip the switch and bring back many African-American voters in an election that reminds us that the narrative of the black party politics is more nuanced and complicated than we have historically thought. The New Deal did not cement a political realignment; while many African Americans were willing to support Democrats for social welfare policy, that support was hesitant at best. African Americans were discontent with the Democratic dithering, division, and detachment on civil rights. The Eisenhower Administration commitment to equal justice, the targeted campaign efforts, and the Republican Party's historical appeal led to a throwing of the switch.

⁹⁶Eisenhower to Anthony Parshley, November 16, 1956 in, *The Papers of DDE* vol. 16, 2396.

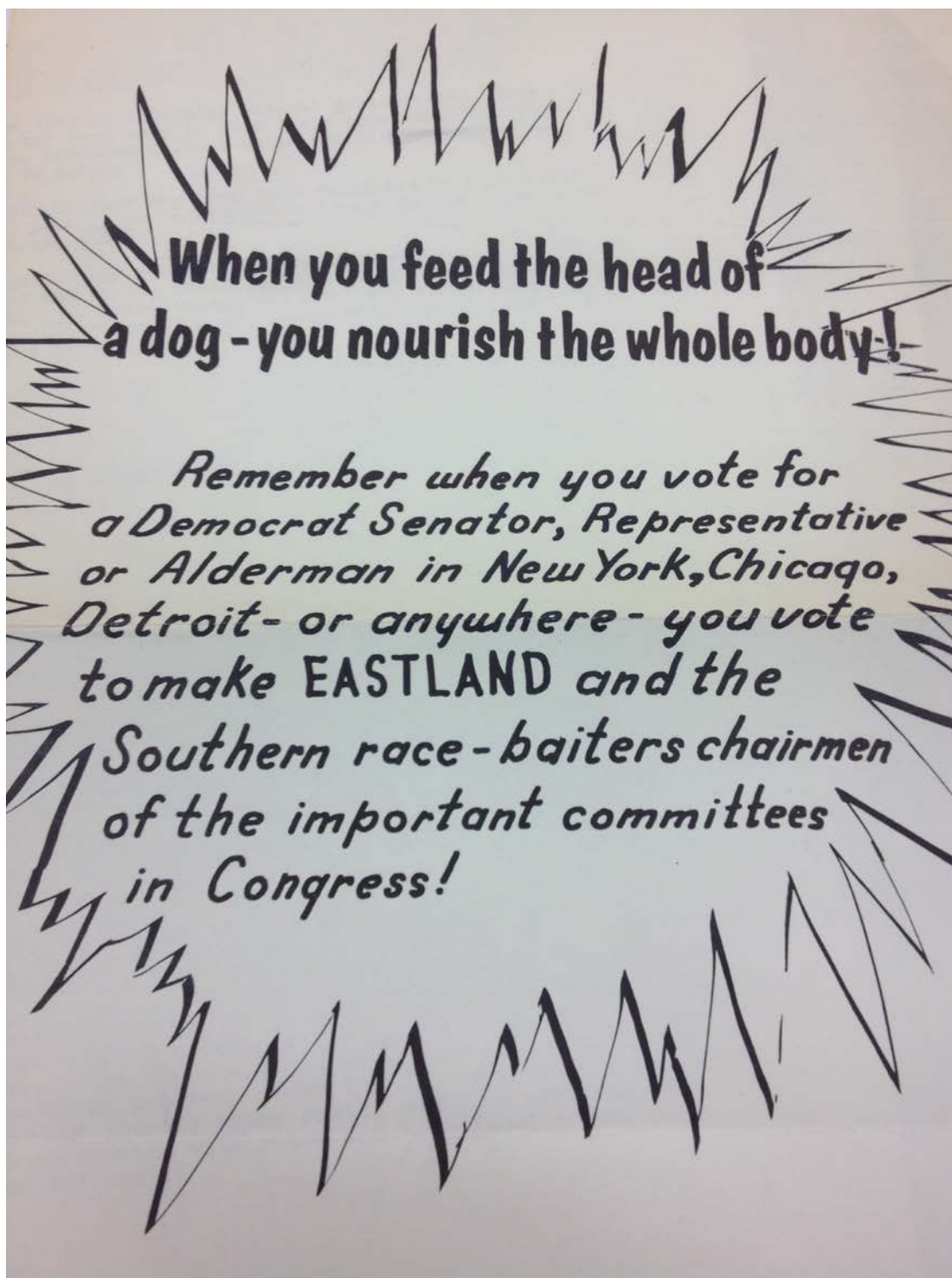
⁹⁷"Why Negroes Switched to Ike," *Jet* 11 no. 3 (November 22, 1956): microform in LOC.

Photo Appendix



This full page advertisement was consistent with other Democratic ads portraying Stevenson as the man of the people.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ NAACP Papers, box IX: 43, LOC.



This leaflet was a Republican attack advertisement used to stimulate black support for Republican Congressional candidates.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ NAACP Papers box III: 113A, LOC.

BIGGEST BECAUSE IT'S THE BEST!
 * * * * * Afro Magazine Section * * * * * October 29, 1956 Page 8

FOR THE RECORD...

this is how 'IKE' feels about YOU!

EISENHOWER SAID...

1942... "My policy for handling colored troops will be segregation where facilities are afforded."
Without waiting for Eisenhower's order, General Patton made his famous break through invasion of Germany mixing colored and white troops.

1948... General Eisenhower discusses integration before the Senate Armed Services Committee:
 "If we attempt merely by passing a lot of laws to force someone to like someone else, we are just going to get into trouble."
President Truman didn't agree. He ordered integration of armed forces and completed it in the Air Force and Navy before he went out of office. There was no "trouble."


1954... "I have no plan."
AUGUST 4th
 Eisenhower in press conference was asked what steps he could take to secure decent and well located houses for all citizens.

1955... "I care not what it is..."
JUNE 8th
 Eisenhower (Press Conference) asked to comment on NAACP amendment to National Guard Bill prohibiting segregation.

1955... "Why muddy the water... It is extraneous."
JULY 6th
 Eisenhower press conference comment on Powell anti-segregation amendment to Federal School Construction Bill.

1955... "Federal Government has no jurisdiction."
OCTOBER 24th
 White House response to delegation of 32 Chicago citizens protesting Till lynching.

1956... "The situation is a local matter."
FEBRUARY 8th
 Eisenhower (Press Conference) asked to comment on mob's attack upon Miss Autherine Lucy, she sought admission to University of Alabama.



A CONFEDERATE CAMPAIGN HAT worn recently by President Eisenhower's grandson at Gettysburg, Pa. ... of all places ... where thousands of Union soldiers died to free the slaves and save the union, is in extremely bad taste.
 President Eisenhower also paid high tribute to the "Confederate army, its heroes and their cause" before a huge audience of Dixiecrats in Columbia, S.C. in 1952. Colored listeners said they were astonished and insulted.

SUPREME COURT DECISION IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOL CASES

EISENHOWER says:
 makes no difference whether I endorse it."
This Advertisement Endorsed by Democratic National Committee.

STEVENSON says:
 "I believe that decision to be right."

* * * * *

This Democratic attack ad was a page from a larger pamphlet that compared Eisenhower and Stevenson on civil rights.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ NAACP Papers, box III: 113A, LOC.

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A Note on Primary Source Periodicals

Due to the overwhelming number of periodicals they have been cited only in the footnotes. All newspapers and magazines, unless otherwise indicated, were accessed online at Gettysburg College through America's Historical Newspapers. Jet was accessed on microform in Newspaper and Periodical Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Several other newspapers were found in the NAACP papers in the Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.