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Yankee Party or Southern Strategy? George Aiken and the Republican Party, 1936–1972

As the country's political leaders attempted to cope with the emerging crisis in race relations, Aiken and a handful of others urged their party to reject the strategy of joining forces with southern reactionaries.

By BRUCE H. KALK

“A five-foot-eight Abe Lincoln”: so the press of the 1930s described George Aiken, and Aiken did indeed wrestle with some of the same questions that vexed the sixteenth president.¹ George Aiken's career in American politics spanned nearly half a century. During that time he sought to find a more liberal path for his Republican Party. “The greatest praise I can give to Lincoln on this his anniversary,” Aiken said in 1938, at a time when the GOP refused to accept the necessity of New Deal reforms, “is to say that he would be ashamed of his party's leadership today.”²

A decade later Aiken was still trying to nudge his party away from right-wing conservatism. One part of the larger campaign to liberalize the party meant furthering the black struggle for equality, a matter of signal importance to African Americans (of whom there were few in Vermont) and potentially to the Republican Party, as it tried to regain support lost to the forces of Franklin D. Roosevelt. As the country's political leaders attempted to cope with the emerging crisis in race relations, Aiken and a handful of others urged their party to reject the strategy of joining forces with southern reactionaries. These centrists persisted until the Democratic Party became the latter-day champion of the African American quest for equal rights and right-wing Goldwaterites triumphed within the GOP. That the sympathetic Aiken did not assume

an even greater role in the civil rights issue is perhaps the nub of the story for Vermonters and for advocates of racial tolerance in general. Had he persevered and had the GOP heeded his advice rather than following that of Barry Goldwater and Strom Thurmond, the "prodigal South" would most assuredly not have returned to power and Lincoln's and Aiken's beloved party of "free soil, free labor, and free men" would have stood squarely on the side of racial justice.³ That the Republican Party chose not to follow Aiken's path reflects both the ambiguity of the liberal's role within the party and Aiken's limited interest in much of the civil rights agenda.

A principled but by no means ideologically rigid man, Aiken was frustrated with the Republican old guard in Vermont and with the party's hidebound response to Roosevelt's New Deal. Aiken catalyzed the more progressive⁴ wing of Vermont's Republican Party, beginning with his challenge to the Speaker of the Vermont House of Representatives as a first-term member from Putney in 1930 and culminating in his victory in the 1936 gubernatorial primary over Ernest Moore, who carried the endorsement of old guard Governor Charles M. Smith.⁵ In the midst of the Great Depression and at the nadir of Republican strength nationwide, Aiken then won the general election. A believer in fiscal restraint who opposed deficit spending and a devotee of decentralized governmental power, Governor Aiken nevertheless received wide press for his criticisms of the party leadership's "hate Roosevelt" campaigns and emerged as a leading voice for liberal Republicanism after his election. Nearly alone in the nation, Vermont remained rock-ribbed Republican during the New Deal years. Even in this Republican bastion, however, support for Roosevelt did erode the state's GOP base.⁶

Despite his own party's rejection of the New Deal, the governor's views were unabashed. "Can we today afford," he asked in 1938, "to have spots of class privilege and bitterness and exploitation in our industrial system comparable to those which existed in agriculture in Lincoln's day?"⁷ Vermonters seemed to agree with Aiken's outlook; they elected their extremely popular governor to the U.S. Senate in 1940. Wendell Willkie, the party's defeated presidential nominee that year, sought Aiken's counsel on how to liberalize the GOP after the 1940 election.⁸ Architect of the federal food stamp program, leading proponent of the St. Lawrence Seaway project, ardent enemy of private utilities and oil companies, advocate of higher minimum wages, and (perhaps most surprisingly) valued friend of organized labor, Senator George Aiken defied the classic description of a Republican.⁹ Aiken was practically alone among Republicans in receiving the formal endorsement of the Congress of Industrial Organizations' Political Action Committee (CIO-PAC) during the 1940s. He strug-

gled against the bankruptcy of political leadership he saw in his party and maintained throughout the 1950s that Republicans needed to move away from conservative stances on the issues. "The Republican party can no longer maintain a middle of the road attitude particularly if it means half-way between Grant and McKinley," Aiken once commented.¹⁰

The party of Ulysses S. Grant had used federal troops to protect the emancipated slaves and tried to safeguard African Americans against racial discrimination during Reconstruction. Since then, it had been a most reluctant guardian of its black "wards." In states where African Americans were able to exercise the franchise after Reconstruction, the black vote was straight Republican.¹¹ The party, however, had provided little in return. Although the GOP dominated national politics for most of the first three decades of the twentieth century, the party proved ineffectual at stemming the tide of Jim Crow and disfranchisement that had overtaken much of the country. Republicans on Capitol Hill had introduced voting rights legislation in 1890 and the Dyer antilynching bill in 1922. But committed advocacy for the party's most loyal constituents remained a low priority at the very time that African Americans confronted a rigid racial caste system that relegated them to second-class citizenship in the South and elsewhere. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), for example, sharply criticized President Herbert Hoover's nomination of North Carolina judge John J. Parker to the Supreme Court in 1930 because the jurist had favored excluding black voters from southern elections.¹² When Hoover attempted to reform the Republican Party in the South by replacing biracial "black-and-tan" organizations with "lily-white" ones that he thought would be more palatable to the electorate there, African Americans nationwide were furious. Black voters nevertheless continued to cast their ballots for Hoover, who in 1932 received 75 percent of the vote in Chicago's black wards and 82 percent in Cleveland's.¹³

As the GOP had all but deserted black voters, the Democratic Party cautiously attempted to bring African Americans into its New Deal coalition. Although President Roosevelt never followed the example of some congressional Democrats in pushing for repeal of the poll tax and for passage of federal antilynching legislation, his administration's measures to provide relief for the unemployed benefited the many African Americans who struggled even in the best of times. Likewise, symbolic efforts to include blacks under the New Deal umbrella, such as the establishment of an unofficial "black cabinet" under Mary McLeod Bethune and the outspoken support of Eleanor Roosevelt for civil rights legislation, underscored the myriad ways the Democratic Party tailored its message to appeal to black voters. And African Americans responded to these

appeals. "Go turn Lincoln's picture to the wall," urged one black publisher; "that debt has been paid in full."¹⁴ Starting in the 1934 midterm elections, black voters moved en masse away from their historic Republican loyalties toward the Democratic Party.

As the Democratic Party edged toward acceptance of African Americans within its tent and as its economic liberalism solidified even after the emergency conditions of 1933-1937, many southern Democrats found themselves increasingly dismayed with the "party of the fathers." By 1938, in the wake of President Roosevelt's plan to "pack the court" with liberal justices, a coalition of disgruntled southern conservatives and northern Republicans emerged on Capitol Hill. As this coalition successfully stymied further reform and as Roosevelt's attention focused on foreign affairs, the New Deal ground to a halt.¹⁵ Democratic governor Herman Tamm of Georgia suggested that northern Republicans and southern Democrats merge to form a new party based on limited government and the strict preservation of states' rights; a few years later, Senator John Bricker (R.-Oh.) made a similar proposal. In fact, with the defection of northern blacks, the GOP had to consider what path it should follow to return to the majority nationwide. His party recovering from the 1936 presidential debacle, George Aiken entered the maelstrom of national politics.

Where lay the future of the Grand Old Party? Aiken felt sure that it did not lie south. From the beginning of his career, he spoke out aggressively against the privileged position of southern delegates at Republican national conventions. Although the Republican Party had barely cracked the "solid South" since Reconstruction (only in the GOP landslides of 1920 and 1928 had any state of the former Confederacy cast its electoral votes for a Republican), the Republican National Committee accorded the southern states representation roughly equivalent to their populations. These "rotten boroughs" did serve the purpose of reminding the party of its historic commitment to African Americans, since some delegations were racially integrated and it could escape no one's attention that the party had so far failed to become an electorally competitive institution in every part of the country. Nevertheless, outside of pockets of traditional Republicanism, such as eastern Tennessee,¹⁶ the chief aim of the GOP organizations in the South was to provide a mechanism for federal job-seekers when the party was in power in Washington. What is more, the party's southern committeemen generally favored the candidates and policies of the old guard, notably in 1912, when they helped award the presidential nomination to William Howard Taft rather than Theodore Roosevelt. The historic lesson of 1912 (a divided GOP lost the general election that year) and George Aiken's animosity toward the old guard

propelled his efforts to mute southern accents at the Republican National Committee.

Aiken had no tolerance for a system that clearly handicapped smaller but loyal Republican states like Vermont in selecting the party's presidential nominee. In an open letter to the Republican National Committee in 1937, Aiken demanded "that at the earliest opportunity the National Committee be purged of the baneful influence of the Southern Committeemen who represent no one except themselves and their allied officeholders, past and present—mostly past."¹⁷ The *New York Herald Tribune*, the oracle of liberal Republicans, saw this as an indirect threat to secede from the party. Whether or not that was Aiken's intention, by challenging the leadership he emerged overnight as a celebrity within the high counsels of the GOP.¹⁸

Aiken aimed his criticism at the only strategy the party knew to bring the South into the GOP. It is important to note that Aiken did not propose the alternative—namely, that the GOP abandon even the pretense of protecting the rights of African Americans in order to capture more southern votes, as the "lily-whites" had advocated all along. In fact, Aiken was tacitly suggesting that the Republican Party acknowledge itself as a distinctly northern institution and accord its most committed constituency a greater voice in shaping its future. His point carried weight. *Yankee* magazine featured Aiken on its September 1938 cover as "Governor of the 'sovereign people of the free nation of Vermont'" and mischievously posed the question, "Is there a Yankee party?" Many of this New England magazine's loyal readers cited Aiken as their preferred standard-bearer.¹⁹

The response to his criticism accentuated the sectional divisiveness



"His Baby," cartoon by Grover Page. *Louisville Courier-Journal*, December 7, 1937. Courtesy of the *Louisville Courier-Journal*.

of Aiken's comments. Many leading northeastern newspapers, including the *Boston Globe*, *Philadelphia Daily News*, *Washington Post*, *Providence Journal*, and the *Christian Science Monitor*, issued approving editorials.²⁰ Predictably, Republican National Committee members from South Carolina, Florida, Louisiana, Arkansas, Texas, and Mississippi were outraged at Aiken's proposal.²¹ One anonymous letter from "an Old Marietta Rebel" expresses the rancor Aiken had intensified: "There are about 4000 of your citizens - N.H. etc that liked the soil of Ga.'s old Red Hills so well after running around Kennesaw Mt. that they are still resting here - but are not foraging around at the present time neither are they striking matches around Atlanta, Ga."²² Perry Howard, at the time the only black member of the Republican National Committee, took Aiken's remarks not as a slap at southern whites in the GOP but as an attack on "the influence of Negroes in the Republican Party."²³ While Aiken was less motivated to address racial conflict within the GOP than to undermine the old guard, he did respond to an NAACP query that he had never been "partisan as regards the racial question and . . . deplored the controversies due to occupational, religious, class or racial differences of opinion."²⁴

In fact, Aiken quickly joined the small band of liberal Republicans who hoped their progressive view would allow them to assume the moral high ground and thereby recapture support from labor, farmers, and blacks. During the 1940s Aiken clarified his position on the "southern question" by cosponsoring bills to abolish the federal poll tax and to prohibit racial discrimination in employment.²⁵ An early supporter of federal aid to education, Aiken joined black organizations in opposing a conservative ruse to defeat the Thomas-Hill education bill of 1943. The senator was one of only two Republicans to do so and received praise from the *New Republic* for his steadfastness.²⁶ Republican governor Thomas E. Dewey of New York, who enacted the country's first statewide legislation establishing fair employment practices,²⁷ and Senator Henry Cabot Lodge Jr. (R.-Mass.) were, with Aiken, early leaders of the liberal Republican movement that hoped to embarrass the Democratic Party because of its historic association with segregationists.

Some Republicans, however, were mindful instead of the potential for disrupting the Democratic hegemony by formalizing Capitol Hill's conservative coalition and forming a new party of northern Republicans and dissatisfied southern Democrats. Once again, Aiken maintained that the party's future did not lie south. The Democratic Party was in the midst of an internal struggle with Jim Crow. When the Democratic national convention adopted a civil rights plank in its 1948 platform, southern delegates walked out and threw their support to Dixiecrat governor

J. Strom Thurmond of South Carolina rather than President Harry Truman. Although Truman won without the Deep South, Thurmond's rump candidacy carried four states out of the Democratic column and exposed the fissures that were erupting in the once solid South.²⁸ Eyeing a golden opportunity, Senator Bricker proposed a Republican-Dixiecrat merger in 1949. Aiken recoiled from the suggestion, saying that such a coalition "would knock out all hopes for a Republican victory in future presidential or national elections." He added: "It would cost the Republicans the industrial northeast, now their stronghold. I know of no Republicans in that area who want to line up with poll-tax Dixiecrats. . . . Northern Republicans will never join opposition to civil rights measures."²⁹

Despite such words, however, civil rights issues were simply not paramount in his mind. Although Aiken made overtures to the black community and objected to joining forces with southern segregationists, he was primarily concerned with other matters; he was arguably the most articulate voice in the U.S. Senate on farm issues and plans for developing the St. Lawrence Seaway. But because he hailed from the state with the smallest black population in the country (as late as 1960, only 519 African Americans lived in Vermont), Aiken simply did not see race relations as the critical issue in American politics during and after World War II.³⁰ Vermont justifiably prided itself on its history as the first state to prohibit slavery and grant the franchise regardless of race, and fond memories of the state's abolitionist legacy endured.³¹ In addition, despite the state's tiny African American population, two black legislators had served in the Vermont General Assembly, one in the 1830s and the second from 1945 to 1949.³² But unlike Vermont, much of the rest of the country struggled intensely with black protest. The peripheral nature of Aiken's interest in civil rights issues underscored the difficulty he would have in pushing his moral vision of the future of the Republican Party.

Aiken and his allies attempted to implement that moral vision in 1950 when the party leadership appointed the senator to its Committee on Republican Principles, then working on an important restatement of the party's stance on vital issues of the day.³³ Liberal Republicans were already dejected. In the aftermath of Thomas E. Dewey's unsuccessful bid for the White House, their own Henry Cabot Lodge Jr. had failed in challenging the leader of the conservative stalwarts, Senator Robert A. Taft (R.-Oh.), as chairman of the Senate Republican Policy Committee.³⁴ Aiken's Capitol Hill allies included Senator Margaret Chase Smith (R.-Me.) and Representatives Irving Ives (R.-N.Y.) and Jacob K. Javits (R.-N.Y.) in addition to Lodge. These Young Turks sought to use the committee's document, "A Declaration of Republican Principles," to further their agenda

for the Republican Party.³⁵ They were clearly interested in cementing the party's commitment to civil rights for African Americans:

The Republican Party was founded to proclaim and enforce these [civil] rights, and it is now the duty of the Party to proceed uncompromisingly to complete this task. Political alliances with Democrats who would withhold the civil rights from certain groups are essentially anti-Republican. . . . No compromise with expediency, no alliance for supposed political advantage, can be permitted to divert the Party from the fulfillment of this program.³⁶

The liberal Republicans, however, faced defeat once again. Conservatives controlled the language of the committee's final product, which Aiken denounced for its "glaring weaknesses" and as a step backward from the 1948 Republican platform. Aiken, in fact, was a pressing critic of the committee's work, including its "weak and vacillating" position on the civil rights issue.³⁷ Senator Hubert H. Humphrey (D.-Minn.) denounced the party for using its "Declaration of Republican Principles" to curry favor with segregationists.³⁸ While the party chiefs tried to deflect the accusation, it is clear that liberal Republicans feared the party was heading in a southerly direction as well.³⁹

As Republican leaders continued to straddle the issue, the Democrats had problems of their own in holding together an incongruous coalition that included both African Americans and segregationists. In 1952, in an apparent effort to woo back the bolting Dixiecrats, the Democratic National Convention nominated Alabama senator John Sparkman for vice president. For his part, Adlai Stevenson, the Democratic presidential nominee, tried to regain backing in the Deep South by opposing a compulsory fair employment practices commission.⁴⁰ With prominent southern Democrats chairing many of the most important committees on Capitol Hill, some African Americans began to question the wisdom of giving up completely on the GOP.⁴¹ After Chief Justice Earl Warren, a former Republican governor, authored his opinion in *Brown v. Board of Education*, even more blacks defected from the Democratic Party in the 1956 presidential race: some 40 percent of African American voters cast their ballots for President Dwight D. Eisenhower's reelection.⁴² The question of civil rights was splitting the Democratic Party.

The Eisenhower administration wanted to move forward to appeal to black voters—but only tenuously, so that disenchanted southern Democrats would still feel that they could turn to the GOP. Without caving in to either the most resistant defenders of Jim Crow or the most passionate advocates of racial integration, the Republican Party stood to gain a great deal by pursuing the middle ground.⁴³ Eisenhower hoped to attract the votes of both the black middle class and white southern moderates.

For his part, however, Senator Aiken remained focused on farm policy, particularly now that his party was in power in the White House. As the civil rights movement erupted with the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955-1956, catapulting Martin Luther King Jr. to fame, the administration advanced a modest civil rights bill.

The civil rights bill of 1957, which concentrated on expanding voting rights for blacks, was the first such legislation passed in the twentieth century. Although the bill had a narrow impact, Aiken opposed some of its provisions. Aiken and Senator Clinton P. Anderson (D-N.M.) objected to that part of the bill that expanded the power of the attorney general to investigate alleged voting rights violations. The same section of the bill provided for trying without a jury those charged with violating civil rights, preventing all-white juries in the South from "winking at" officials who deprived African Americans of the right to vote. Aiken was appalled. In the Vermonter's words, this "would provide legal weapons with which to press integration into all phases of public life" and could lead to an abuse of individual liberties akin in his view to what occurred during Reconstruction.⁴⁴

Aiken thus expressed the growing awareness that civil rights issues affected not only the South but the entire country and that the solutions to the problems of Jim Crow laws themselves raised possibilities of wrongdoing. In the process, Aiken also defined the limits of his own vision of how far the GOP should go to support the civil rights movement. It was one matter to oppose blatantly discriminatory practices, as he had for many years, but lacking an intimate knowledge of the black experience in the South and the white resistance to change, Aiken simply could not see the purpose of the measures outlined in the civil rights bill. In this regard, Aiken distanced himself from some of his liberal Republican colleagues, notably Javits (by then a senator), who opposed his efforts to amend the bill.⁴⁵ Aiken and Anderson were nevertheless successful in their aims; the final Civil Rights Act of 1957 did not contain the offending section.

When landmark civil rights legislation came before the Senate in 1964, Aiken, who generally supported the measure, again objected to one of its important provisions. Perhaps the most significant aspect of the 1964 bill was its proposed eradication of segregation in such places as theaters, motels, and restaurants. In this instance, Aiken opposed including small boardinghouses under the bill's jurisdiction.⁴⁶ "Let them integrate the Waldorf and other large hotels, but permit the 'Mrs. Murphy's,' who run the small rooming houses all over the country, to rent their rooms to those they choose," Aiken remarked.⁴⁷ By April 1964 Aiken had negotiated a compromise on "Mrs. Murphy" over a series of breakfast con-

versations with Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (D.-Mont.); the implied quid pro quo was his support for ending debate on the legislation.⁴⁸ Although some critics accused Aiken of obstructionism, his backing of an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) with powerful investigatory teeth clarified his support for the bill, as did his opposition to the raft of unfriendly amendments that segregationists proposed in order to mitigate its authority.⁴⁹ Alfred Haynes, the Vermont NAACP chapter president, criticized Aiken for his qualms over the civil rights legislation.⁵⁰ What is noteworthy again is the nature of Aiken's support for the bill, which he backed with qualifications. If the senator truly intended to liberalize his party, his wholehearted endorsement of the most egalitarian racial legislation in nearly a century would seem essential.

In fact, the Republican Party revisited the question of racial equality in its acrimonious struggle over the 1964 presidential nomination. Senator Barry M. Goldwater (R.-Ariz.) led an insurgent campaign of conservative enthusiasts who sought to take over the party. In the process, because of Goldwater's opposition to civil rights legislation, the GOP could turn south and aim at the votes of Dixiecrat segregationists, a strategy tantamount to "hunting where the ducks are," in Goldwater's own words.⁵¹ Aiken had recently argued that the GOP should establish its commitment to civil rights, but it is clear that he did not envisage the upcoming denouement. He thought that the "radical right," which he vaguely associated with Goldwater's most extreme followers, did not have "a ghost of a chance of controlling the party."⁵² But events proved Aiken wrong as the Goldwater movement routed the liberal Republicans. Aiken attended the GOP convention in San Francisco's Cow Palace, where he quixotically nominated Margaret Chase Smith for president (Aiken was ill disposed by temperament to support New York governor Nelson Rockefeller, the primary alternative to Goldwater).⁵³ Unlike some liberals, he pledged to support the party's nominee, but Aiken refused to back a measure to give the convention to Goldwater unanimously.⁵⁴

Despite the extent of Goldwater's defeat to Lyndon B. Johnson that November, five Deep South states went Republican for the first time since Reconstruction. The party had unequivocally chosen to abandon the demands of its liberal wing for good, particularly the liberals' insistence that the party align itself forthrightly against the Dixiecrat segregationists. Although liberals continued to exert some influence in party councils, their movement was dying a slow death.⁵⁵ Aiken's nomination of Senator Smith occasioned at least one apt if effusive editorial lamenting their plight:

It is a symbol of the great majority of Americans who—like Senators Aiken and Smith—hold beliefs which they will defend eternally against

those of the John Birch Society, against the southern racists, against extremists of both the right and the left. They are the voices crying in the wilderness of the Goldwater-dominated Republican Convention. Those who believe in human rights, in civil rights . . . and those who cherish the heritage of a nation that has produced men and women like George Aiken and Margaret Smith will get the message—one which the lives of such people speak so eloquently through the record of their years in public life, a message of hope, moral courage and determination to fight for what is decent and in good conscience.⁵⁶

Aiken's last hurrah in his halfhearted campaign to infuse his party with that "good conscience" occurred the following year when he championed landmark voting rights legislation. Again, however, there were limits to Aiken's full commitment in this area. Literacy tests, often unfairly administered, continued to disfranchise many African Americans in the South, and Aiken was one of the most prominent backers of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.⁵⁷ Pointing out that his own state did not have educational requirements for its voters, Aiken wryly commented that "in Vermont, even idiots can vote."⁵⁸ But while Aiken had long favored abolition of the poll tax for state and federal elections, he stood against abolishing the poll tax for municipal elections. In the state of Vermont, towns levied a one-dollar tax for participation in annual town meetings. Aiken feared that this hallowed New England institution would go by the wayside if local communities no longer tied such democratic participation to a token financial responsibility.⁵⁹ When the legislation passed, Aiken commented that his party would not receive much credit: "Our Madison Avenue division is not very strong and what we do doesn't get advertised very effectively."⁶⁰ The Johnson administration, in fact, had worked diligently to pass the measure, and most of its supporters were northern Democrats.

With the Democrats now firmly connected in the public mind with the black struggle for equality and with his own party overtaken by Goldwaterite appeals to recovering segregationists, Aiken and the other liberals retreated and accommodated the party's right-wing stance. This accommodation became more obvious with the advent of Richard Nixon's southern strategy during and after the 1968 election. The beneficiary of renewed southern distaste for the Johnson-Humphrey administration, in large measure because of its connection with the cause of civil rights, Nixon bargained with prominent southern leaders. Perhaps the most prominent was Senator Strom Thurmond, who left the Democrats for the GOP in 1964 because of his delight at the party's nomination of Goldwater. Promising to slow the federal government's push for racial integration in the public schools and to appoint conservative "strict constructionist" justices to the Supreme Court, Nixon received enough southern support

to win both his party's nomination and a narrow victory in November over Hubert Humphrey and George Wallace. Two decades after John Bricker had advanced a merger plan between southern Democrats and conservative Republicans, Nixon cemented Goldwaterite gains in the South to make that coalition a reality.

Aiken, in fact, was a staunch Nixon supporter. When the administration stood with thirty Mississippi school districts in requesting a delay in integrating their school systems, the Vermont senator did not raise his voice in protest. When Nixon nominated to the Supreme Court Clement F. Haynsworth Jr., a conservative South Carolina judge with a less-than-enthusiastic record for implementing the *Brown* decision, Aiken voted for confirmation. (Haynsworth also faced allegations, never convincingly demonstrated, of a conflict of interest.) The Senate rejected the nomination but was in a most conciliatory mood—ready, said Aiken, to confirm anybody, “unless he has committed murder—recently.”⁶¹ But Nixon's next nominee, Harold Carswell, was an outright reactionary; while many moderate and liberal Republicans voted against both Haynsworth and Carswell, George Aiken quietly went along with the president, although his vote was far from certain until the last minute. Once again, the Senate rejected Nixon's nominee.

The southern strategy nevertheless reaped substantial benefits as Nixon cruised to an easy reelection, sweeping the entire South in a Republican landslide. Mississippi, Nixon's best state by far, cast 80 percent of its vote for the Republicans.

“Your victory,” Aiken wrote Nixon upon his reelection, “was not only overwhelming but very heartwarming for Lola and me.”⁶² Nixon was gratified as well. After years of infighting, the Republican Party had determined a course for itself that could restore it as the majority party nationally. The small but vocal liberal Republicans were practically extinct. Gone were their chastisements of the right wing for reaching southward for support; gone were their dissertations on the party's “Lincolanian heritage” and its historic commitment to African Americans. Liberal leaders like George Aiken had genuinely sought a more progressive direction for the GOP on a host of issues, but Aiken never pushed hard on the civil rights issue and ultimately saw northern Democrats advance their party far beyond his own limited vision of what the federal government should do for disfranchised blacks. During Aiken's last years in the Senate, the federal government's concern with civil rights faded. While Nixon advanced the agenda of affirmative action during his administration, he realigned his party toward the interests of those inimical to furthering the struggle for racial equality.

“Over the next four years,” Nixon wrote back to Aiken, “I shall do

everything I possibly can to make the kind of record which all Americans, regardless of party, can look back upon with pride as we celebrate America's 200th Birthday in 1976."⁶³ Perhaps instead it was Aiken's moral vision from the 1940s and 1950s, a view the Grand Old Party never adopted, that Americans regardless of party could look back on with pride. Whether because he lacked the will or the power, Aiken proved unable to make his party share his vision.

NOTES

¹ A brief Aiken-for-president boom in 1937-1939 popularized the comparison with Abraham Lincoln. Robert R. Mullen, "George Aiken: New England's Favorite Son," *Forum* (10 September 1939): 36-41. See also *Literary Digest* (18 December 1937): 8, and, more generally, D. Gregory Sanford, "You Can't Get There from Here: The Presidential Boomlet for Governor George D. Aiken, 1937-1939," *Vermont History* 49 (fall 1981): 197-208.

² *Newsweek*, 21 February, 1938, 15. I am deeply indebted to Clyde P. Weed, *The Nemesis of Reform: The Republican Party During the New Deal* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) for clarifying the options available to the GOP during the dark years of the Great Depression. I am also very grateful to Nicol C. Rae, *The Decline and Fall of the Liberal Republicans: From 1952 to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) for explaining the ideological path that Aiken and other detractors of the old guard chose.

³ Harry S. Dent, *The Prodigal South Returns to Power* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1978) and Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970).

⁴ The term *progressive* does not imply that Aiken's old guard enemies opposed progress per se. Rather, it describes those within the GOP who preferred Theodore Roosevelt to William Howard Taft in 1912. By and large, progressives favored limited federal intervention in the economy to regulate the seemingly destructive forces within industrial capitalism, whereas the old guard identified with a strict laissez-faire economic philosophy derived from the classical economic theories of David Ricardo and Adam Smith.

⁵ Samuel B. Hand and D. Gregory Sanford, "Carrying Water on Both Shoulders: George D. Aiken's 1936 Gubernatorial Campaign in Vermont," *Vermont History* 43 (fall 1975): 303.

⁶ It will be remembered that Republican Alfred M. Landon carried only two states in the 1936 presidential election: Vermont and Maine. Franklin D. Roosevelt and his Democratic followers swamped the GOP that year, and even in Vermont the Republican margin was narrower than usual in this traditionally one-party state. George Aiken, in fact, was one of only four Republicans elected governor in 1936.

In the 1920 and 1924 presidential races, the party captured over 75 percent of the vote statewide and swept every county. During the 1928 "Al Smith revolution" that catalyzed immigrant votes nationwide, however, the Democrats became competitive in Chittenden, Franklin, and Grand Isle Counties, each of which possessed substantial Irish and French Canadian populations. By the 1936 presidential election, Landon still carried the state, but with only 56 percent of the vote, and he lost in all three of these northern counties. In fact, in the 1934 Senate race, Republican Warren Austin had only narrowly retained his seat (51 to 48 percent) by fewer than 4,000 of more than 130,000 votes east, the worst Republican showing for a Vermont Senate seat until the 1970s.

On the party's difficulties in its own northern New England stronghold during those chilly Depression days, see George T. Mazuzan, "Vermont's Traditional Republicanism vs. the New Deal: Warren R. Austin and the Election of 1934," *Vermont History* 39 (spring 1971): 128-141; Thomas T. Spencer, "As Goes Maine, So Goes Vermont: The 1936 Democratic Campaign in Vermont," *Vermont History* 46 (fall 1978): 234-243; and Thomas T. Spencer, "The New Deal and the 'Granite State': The 1936 Democratic Presidential Campaign in New Hampshire," *Historical New Hampshire* 35 (summer 1980): 186-201. Labor strife also posed a threat to Republican hegemony, even in Yankee territory; see Richard H. Condon, "Bayonets at the North Bridge: The Lewiston-Auburn Shoe Strike, 1937," *Maine Historical Society Quarterly* 21 (fall 1981): 75-98.

⁷ George Aiken, "Self-Reliance and Self-Respect," Lincoln Day Dinner Speech, February 10, 1938, at the Haverhill Club, *Vital Speeches* 4 (1 March 1938): 314-315.

⁸ Wendell Willkie to George Aiken, 19 November 1940, crate 60, box 4, George Aiken Papers, Bailey/Howe Library, University of Vermont, Burlington.

⁹ Herbert S. Parmet, "George Aiken: A Republican Senator and His Party," in Michael Sherman, ed., *The Political Legacy of George D. Aiken: Wise Old Owl of the U.S. Senate* (Woodstock, Vt.: Countryman Press and the Vermont Historical Society, 1995): 37-46; William Doyle, *The Vermont Political Tradition and Those Who Helped Make It* (Montpelier, Vt.: William Doyle, 1984): 185-187; Paul M. Searls, "George Aiken and the Taft-Hartley Act: A Less Undesirable Alternative," *Vermont History* 60 (summer 1992): 155-166; Anna Rothe, ed., "George D. Aiken," *Current Biography: Who's News and Why, 1947* (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1948): 2-5. The governor articulated his political philosophy in his own words in George D. Aiken, *Speaking from Vermont* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1938).

¹⁰ *New York Herald Tribune*, 23 September 1944; *New York Times Magazine*, 23 March 1947; and *Rutland Herald*, 11 November 1958. These and all other newspaper references in this essay may be found in the newspaper clipping files of the Aiken Papers.

¹¹ On African Americans and the Republican Party from 1877 to 1940, see James M. McPherson, *The Abolitionist Legacy: From Reconstruction to the NAACP* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); Richard B. Sherman, *The Republican Party and Black America from McKinley to Hoover, 1896-1933* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1973); Donald J. Lisio, *Hoover, Blacks, and Lily-Whites: A Study of Southern Strategies* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985); Nancy J. Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln: Black Politics in the Age of FDR* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); and Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

¹² On the struggle over the nomination of Judge Parker, see Richard L. Watson, "The Defeat of Judge Parker: A Study in Pressure Groups and Politics," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 50 (September 1963): 213-234; Lisio, *Hoover, Blacks, and Lily-Whites*; William C. Burris, *Duty and the Law: Judge John J. Parker and the Constitution* (Bessemer, Ala.: Colonial Press, 1987); Peter G. Fish, "Red Jacket Revisited: Saga of the Case That Unraveled John J. Parker's Appointment to the U.S. Supreme Court," *Law and History Review* 5 (spring 1987): 51-104; and Peter G. Fish, "Spite Nominations to the U.S. Supreme Court: Herbert C. Hoover, Owen J. Roberts, and the Politics of Presidential Vengeance in Retrospect," *Kentucky Law Journal* 77 (1988-1989): 545-576.

¹³ Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln*, 29-31.

¹⁴ As quoted in William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 187.

¹⁵ James T. Patterson, *Congressional Conservatives and the New Deal: The Growth of the Conservative Coalition, 1933-1939* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1967).

¹⁶ Gordon B. McKinney, *Southern Mountain Republicans, 1865-1900: Politics and the Appalachian Community* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978).

¹⁷ As quoted in John Pell, "A Republican Looks Ahead," *North American Review* 246 (winter 1938-1939): 317-324.

¹⁸ *New York Herald Tribune*, 6 December 1937; *Newsweek*, 20 December 1937, 16.

¹⁹ *Yankee*, September 1938, cover, 5-6, 44.

²⁰ *Boston Globe*, 7 December 1937; *Philadelphia Daily News*, 7 December 1937; *Washington Post*, 7 December 1937; *Providence Journal*, 7 December 1937; *Christian Science Monitor*, 8 December 1937.

²¹ *Literary Digest*, 18 December 1937, and *New York Herald Tribune*, 14 December 1937.

²² "An Old Marietta Rebel" to Aiken, n.d., crate 60, box 1, Aiken Papers.

²³ *New York Herald Tribune*, 14 December 1937.

²⁴ Walter White to Aiken, 30 December 1937, crate 60, box 3, Aiken Papers.

²⁵ S.J. Res. 132, 78th Cong. (1944), crate 31, box 3, and S. 101, 79th Cong. (1945), crate 55, box 1, both in Aiken Papers.

²⁶ *New Republic*, 1 November 1943; John A. Neuenschwander, "Senator George D. Aiken and Federal Aid to Education, 1941-1949," M.A. thesis, University of Vermont, 1965, 37-38, 71.

²⁷ Neal R. Peirce, *The Megastates of America: People, Politics, and Power in the Ten Great States* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972), 23.

²⁸ Nadine Cohodas, *Strom Thurmond and the Changing Face of Southern Politics* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1993); V. O. Key Jr., *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949); George B. Tindall, *The Disruption of the Solid South* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972); Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, *The Transformation of Southern Politics* (New York: New American Library, 1976).

²⁹ *Rutland Herald*, 12 December 1949.

³⁰ Stephen M. Wrinn, "Vermont's Perception of Expanding Civil Rights: From Voting Rights to Fair Housing, 1945-1968," M.A. thesis, University of Vermont, 1994: 25.

³¹ Ibid. The constitution of the state of Vermont (1777) forbade the institution of slavery for males over age twenty-one and females over age eighteen and granted universal manhood suffrage (chap. 1, sec. 1, 8).

³² Alexander Twilight represented Brownington from 1836 to 1837; William J. Anderson stood for Shoreham from 1945 to 1949. Elsie B. Smith, "William J. Anderson: Shoreham's Negro Legislator in the Vermont House of Representatives," *Vermont History* 44 (fall 1976): 203-212.

³³ Eugene D. Milliken to Milton R. Young, 5 January 1950, crate 11, box 1, Aiken Papers.

³⁴ Henry Cabot Lodge Jr., *The Storm Has Many Eyes: A Personal Narrative* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973), 72; *Christian Science Monitor*, 8 February 1950.

³⁵ Russell W. Davenport to Aiken, 3 January 1950, crate 11, box 1, Aiken Papers.

³⁶ "A Declaration of Republican Principles," 10, attachment to Davenport to Aiken, 3 January 1950, crate 11, box 1, Aiken Papers.

³⁷ *Christian Science Monitor*, 8 February 1950, and untitled clipping, 12 February 1950, crate 11, box 1, Aiken Papers.

³⁸ *Christian Science Monitor*, 8 February 1950.

³⁹ *New York Times*, 3 March 1950.

⁴⁰ William C. Berman, *The Politics of Civil Rights in the Truman Administration* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1970), 198, 217-219.

⁴¹ See, for example, V. J. Washington, "Republican Case for 1952," *Crisis* (October 1952): 487-491.

⁴² Michael Lind, "The Myth of Barry Goldwater," *New York Review of Books*, 30 November 1995, 27.

⁴³ Frederick Burke, *The Eisenhower Administration and Black Civil Rights* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984).

⁴⁴ As quoted in Wrinn, "Vermont's Perceptions of Expanding Civil Rights," 18-21; "Anderson-Aiken Amendment to Civil Rights Bill," H.R. 6127, crate 55, box 2, Aiken Papers.

⁴⁵ Jacob K. Javits, *Javits: The Autobiography of a Public Man* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), 334-335.

⁴⁶ On Aiken's work on the 1964 civil rights bill, see Wrinn, "Vermont's Perceptions of Expanding Civil Rights," and Gus Buchanan, "George D. Aiken: Compromise with the Civil Rights Legislation of 1963-64," seminar paper, University of Vermont, n.d.

⁴⁷ As quoted in *Washington Post*, 18 June 1963.

⁴⁸ Wrinn, "Vermont's Perceptions of Expanding Civil Rights," 51-52.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 46; *White River Valley Herald*, 25 June 1964.

⁵⁰ *Montpelier Times Argus*, 21 October 1963.

⁵¹ As quoted in Bass and DeVries, *The Transformation of Southern Politics*, 27. It should be noted, however, that the Arizona Republican based his opposition to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 on its infringement on private property rights rather than segregationist demands for states' rights.

⁵² As quoted in *Burlington Free Press*, 19 July 1963.

⁵³ Goldwater's manager suggested that Smith was angling for a vice-presidential nomination, although one might better interpret her actions as a symbolic campaign to oppose the party's right wing. F. Clifton White, *Suite 3505: The Story of the Draft Goldwater Movement* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Arlington House, 1967), 295, 305, and 325.

⁵⁴ *Bennington Banner*, 16 July 1964; *Montpelier Times Argus*, 17 July 1964; *Burlington Free Press*, 20 July 1964; Aiken to E. B. Cornwall, 15 November 1964, crate 13, box 1, Aiken Papers.

⁵⁵ Rae, *The Decline and Fall of the Liberal Republicans*, 118-121. See also Parmet, "George Aiken," 40-42, 46.

⁵⁶ *Brattleboro Daily Reformer*, 14 July 1964.

⁵⁷ He was also a cosponsor of the legislation; S. 1564, 89th Cong. (1965), crate 28, box 1, Aiken Papers. *Los Angeles Times*, 8 August 1965.

⁵⁸ *Washington Post*, 26 April 1964.

⁵⁹ *Chicago Tribune*, 16 May 1965.

⁶⁰ *Montpelier Times Argus*, 27 May 1965.

⁶¹ *Newsweek*, 2 February 1970, 19.

⁶² Aiken to Richard M. Nixon, 8 November 1972, crate 51, box 4, Aiken Papers.

⁶³ Nixon to Aiken, 21 November 1972, crate 51, box 4, Aiken Papers.