# History Of Democratic And Republican Parties

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## Introduction

One of the most common themes in American politics is change. The Americans have personified the idea due to their desire for economic and social growth. The constant desire for change among the American electorates during elections has led to the evolution of American foreign policy, economic progress and advanced social matters. The bipartisan nature of the United States has led to various electoral shifts that define political realignments as very critical during subsequent elections. Over the years, some vital elections have aided in the realignment of the electorate from one party platform to the multiparty system, but with the Democratic and Republican parties being the stable ones. Since the Civil War between the states, the nation has had changes in leadership between the two political parties. The third parties have also participated in the democratic growth of the United States. However, their roles have been limited due to fewer votes for their candidates. Some of the third parties have occasionally disappeared after one or two elections. The two major political parties underwent various developments from 1930 through the 1980s in the face of the New Deal, party realignments, the Great Depression, the Vietnam conflict, voter participation, among others.

## Political Realignments

Political realignments, especially among black voters, began as early as the 1920s. The realignment process was gradual. The black voters felt isolated since their participation in the Republican Party was minimal; hence, they were attracted to the Democratic Party, which was mostly appreciated in the northern wing (Sherman, 1984). In 1932, more than two-thirds of black voters joined the incumbent President Herbert Hoover. The movement went ahead even with the President's failure to recognize the need to help the blacks by implementing economic policies during the Great Depression. Consequently, few blacks participated in the electoral process of choosing a president. Their lack of trust in Republican loyalty was key to lower voter turnout, more so than their dislike of Franklin Roosevelt. President Roosevelt had suppressed the political rights of black Americans in the South. The blacks did not trust Roosevelt because of his ambiguity on the issue of race during campaigns, the mistrust of the party label, as well as Roosevelt's choice of House Speaker John Garner (Texas) as the running mate. John Lynch (Republican Representative of Mississippi in the 1930s) was one of the people who had tried to express the frustrations of black voters and their

reasons for not choosing to vote for a Democratic candidate. In the mid-1930s, Lynch argued that it would be difficult for colored voters to vote for the Democratic ticket. He continued to mention that if the blacks were to choose to vote for the Democratic candidates, it would look like an endorsement of the wrongdoings that happened before and after the Civil War, in which they were the victims. Some of the wrongs that the blacks underwent included deprivation of rights and injustice.

Illinois set the pace for the Democratic Party's gain of strength. The first Congressional District of Illinois led to the beginning of black political realignment in the North. Before South Chicago was realigned into a solid Democratic region, the people had consecutively voted in Republican Oscar De Priest in 1928, 1930 and 1932. The Republicans had enjoyed strong support in Chicago, with William Hale serving as their mayor for two terms. The first term lasted from 1915 through 1923 and the second from 1927 to 1931. There was an influx of blacks in Chicago by 1930, making it the state with the largest population of blacks. The large population of southern blacks encountered a strong Republican Party that enticed them with patronage jobs to receive the black vote. Given the higher population of black voters, the Republicans decided to give them political participation opportunities not experienced anywhere in the United States during the Jim Crow period in the South. The enticement strategy worked because the black voters helped bids for politicians like Thompson, who received at least two-thirds of black voters in the wards they dominated. In appreciation, Mayor Thompson promoted the rise of black politicians, including De Priest, becoming the first African American mayor in 1915. Such acts of courtesy made black Americans remain loyal to the Republican Party locally and nationally (Gosnell, 1969).

The use of political participation as a strategy to get black Americans' votes gave them political experience. The African-American members were involved in politics at the precinct and ward levels. In Chicago, some of the political bigwigs, Richard Daley and Edward Kelly, had a role in the increase of black members on Capitol Hill; they made up a third of the members at the time. The national parties had not realized the value of the African-American votes. The political machines managed to awaken the black population and courted them for their own interests (Gosnell, 1969). The beginning era saw a good relationship between the sponsors and the black politicians. Some of the African Americans who were already Members of Congress were very loyal to the Republican Party. However, the loyalty lasted for quite some time before the black politicians started to question the party on certain racial issues. The party's stand went against some issues important for the African American community. In the 1960s, the black Members of Congress then changed tactics from those of the 1930s. Instead of relying on the already established political machines, they opted to create alternative political bases through civic engagement and familial and community relations.

# Great Depression

The second problem that caused African Americans to feel disenfranchised in the party was President Hoover's move to halt the efforts of reviving the Depression-Era economy that greatly affected the black community. The unstable economy during the financial crisis had hit African Americans harder

than other races. Many black Americans lost jobs due to the financial crisis since it increased the rate of unemployment in the form of agrarian jobs that the blacks relied on. The instability of the cotton market in the mid-1920s, which was vital for African Americans, had already affected their livelihoods. The blacks had also lost industrial jobs during the initial stages of the crisis. This meant that black Americans were already affected by the economic depression before the ultimate market collapse in 1929. A few months after the ultimate crash of the economy, thirty-eight percent of African Americans were unemployed. In comparison, only seventeen percent of whites were unemployed. Critically analyzed against the total population of minority blacks and majority whites, African Americans were affected more. A study ordered by the Roosevelt administration gave skewed results indicating that African Americans made up twenty percent of all Americans on welfare in the nation. The actual result was that black Americans formed only 10 percent of the population on welfare in the county. The misrepresentation was evident in Chicago, where African Americans formed one-fourth of the welfare recipients, yet they made up six percent of the population of the city.

# Voter Participation

Apart from the effects of the Great Depression, political opportunities that some of the black politicians enjoyed in the 1930s convinced some politicians to shift their allegiance. The politicians decided to change allegiance for the general improvement of the black community and personal achievement. William Dawson and Arthur Mitchell represented the younger generation of African Americans who were impatient with the rooted African American Republican leadership. Instead, the young leaders were ambitious and decided to take the chance for personal advancement in politics, leading to the rise of the Democratic Party to the national platform. Mitchell demonstrated vigor in this unstoppable move. During the 1928 presidential campaigns, Mitchell was paid to campaign for the incumbent Hoover. During the presentation, he encountered the campaign team belonging to De Priest during the Chicago engagement. It seems the conversation convinced him to join the Second Ward Regular Republican Organization. His moves were calculated as an interparty challenge to the incumbent. However, Mitchell realized he did not have a chance to grow in De Priest's party. In 1932, he decided to switch camps again. Mitchell campaigned for Roosevelt, who successfully unseated De Priest even though the latter received the majority of African American votes. Consequently, Mitchell became the first black American elected leader to Congress as a Democrat. The Democratic Party received black support because of the economic relief that the New Deal programs offered them. Mitchell appreciated the achievement of New Deal programs under Roosevelt and argued that the achievements played a role in his election (Kenneally, 1993).

Arthur Mitchell inspired many African leaders. William Dawson, formerly De Priest's protégé who had won a seat as a Republican Second Ward council member in Chicago, decided to defect. Dawson had undergone some political frustrations. In 1938, Dawson defeated De Priest in the GOP primary but failed to beat Mitchell in the general elections. Later, he lost his city council seat after De Priest decided to frustrate his participation in the party affairs. Mitchell offered Dawson an opportunity, which the latter did not waste. Dawson switched parties, becoming a Democratic committee member

in the Second Ward. Dawson succeeded Mitchell after his retirement from the House in 1942. The Democratic leadership also used tactics similar to those of the Republicans by offering patronage positions to recruit black leaders to join the party.

Additionally, the perception of black voters all over the country had changed so that the Democratic Party was perceived as representing the interests of the black community. Just like in the case of Dawson, the patronage positions for the black leaders and relief programs during the Depression Era lured the black community. Even though the New Deal programs never provided full economic support or relief to the black communities as they did to the whites, the observable factors convinced the black community that at least something was being done in their favor. The Roosevelt administration learned to gain support for small but symbolic efforts for the marginalized population. Another factor that played a major role in party realignments was the change of generations. The new crop of black voters, displacing their parents and grandparents, had intertwined their political loyalties and experiences with Democratic political bigwigs already dominating the North at the ward level. The effect of realignment was felt in 1936 when Republican nominee Alf Landon only received 28 percent of black votes (Franklin & Higginbotham, 1956). The number of votes in favor of Landon was half of those that Hoover received four years earlier. Even in Congress, party affiliations among black politicians subsequently became one-sided. The realignment realized a decrease in the number of black Republicans elected. For instance, between 1929 and 2007, only five black Republicans were elected, including De Priest.

## The Failures of the New Deal

President Roosevelt remained hesitant and reserved on the issues of black civil rights. He was worried that some of his economic policies could have faced compromise by southern congress members if he raised racial issues. Therefore, Roosevelt dedicated his first term to solving economic challenges brought about during the Depression period. The president's goal to make the economy work meant that he required the ultimate support from the racially conservative Democrats from the South as well. Therefore, his first term was overtaken by economic reconstruction, hence overshadowing all the other concerns. The South had more power in Congress, the same Congress that had a significant role in defining Roosevelt's legacy.

Unfortunately, other structural and institutional reforms concealed the unimpressive role of the president toward the black civil rights activists. With the absence of Roosevelt's involvement in the New Deal reforms, progressive leaders who believed in the New Deal stepped up to advance the cause for the blacks. The attempts led to a redefinition of the perception that the blacks had towards the Democratic Party (Dekhakhena, 2010). However, even with the loss of touch with racial issues, President Roosevelt and his wife, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, stepped up. She nudged her husband to be responsive to the racial issues and, in turn, made connections with African American leaders, including women's rights activists such as Mary Bethune. The other advocate for black Americans was Harold Ickes, who served as President Roosevelt's Secretary of the Interior Department. He decided to

ban segregation in his department. The move was emulated by other executive agencies. He had previously served as the president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) branch of Chicago.

Nonetheless, another shot at the success of the reform anti-lynching legislation failed to succeed, affecting the reforms negatively. However, the unique fact about the failure to implement the legislation was that during this time, there were African American members in Congress. One of the black leaders, Arthur Mitchell, contributed to the shutting down of the legislation by failing to endorse it, even after it received support from the NAACP. Instead, Mitchell introduced his own anti-lynching legislation in Congress in 1935. However, critics argued that the legislation had many legal ambiguities and that it was diluted, giving lenient sentences. However, the Southerners decided to weaken Mitchell's bill further and adopted it. Mitchell sided with the NAACP only after his bill was presented in the 75$^{th}$ Congress.

# Vietnamese Conflict

Between 1964 and 1968, there were outbursts of social movements. The escalation of the U.S. war in Indochina was evident in reports of North Vietnamese attacks on American ships. The attacks contributed to the intensity of protests by college students. Other communities, including Latinos, Asians and Native Americans, copied the African Americans and started to protest. The protests were aimed at challenging the effects of capitalism. Capitalism was, in the sense of traditional trade union organizations, pressed on the rights of the Democratic Party. The movements did not receive mutual support from either party. For instance, in the women's movement fight on the Equal Rights Amendment, the Democrats opposed it while the movement found allies among the Republicans. Lyndon Johnson frustrated African Americans over the dishonesty and delays in solving their issues. He instead funded the Vietnam War. Apart from the war, Republicans did not show interest in solving the problems of black Americans, which was a problem.

# Conclusion

Political realignment has defined the politics of the United States over the years. From the history of the two major political parties, the Republican and Democratic Parties, it is proven that unexpected political realignments and partisan and geopolitical shifts occur every election period. From 1930 through the 1980s, political realignments occurred based on voter participation, the New Deal, the Great Depression and Vietnam conflicts involving the United States. One common denominator in the shifts is the black voter. President Roosevelt's promises to the nation to solve the economic problems and social circumstances that the New Deal presented contributed to the political realignments.

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