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## **"It is our American Destiny to bring about the unity of the Whiteman's World": Political Articulation and White Awakening in the US South Civil Rights Era**

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“It is our American Destiny to bring about the unity of the Whiteman’s World”: Political  
Articulation and White Awakening in the US South Civil Rights Era

A Thesis Presented

By

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“It is our American Destiny to bring about the unity of the Whiteman’s World”: Political  
Articulation and White Awakening in the US South Civil Rights Era

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ABSTRACT

**“IT IS OUR AMERICAN DESTINY TO BRING ABOUT THE UNITY OF THE  
WHITEMAN’S WORLD” : POLITICAL ARTICULATION AND WHITE AWAKENING  
IN THE US SOUTH CIVIL RIGHTS ERA**

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In an application of political articulation theory, this paper analyzes the relationship between white supremacist rhetoric, party politics, and the political field. Using two distinct cases, the Dixiecrats and the National States Rights Party, I ask the questions, how did white supremacist political parties in the mid-twentieth century shape their rhetoric to articulate their constituency? And further, how does a minor party’s position in the political field, center or margin, affect their political articulation? I find that field position does indeed determine a party's use of political articulation. The party with central positioning made appeals to a wider audience by framing their segregationist fight as legalistic in nature, and not white supremacist. In the marginal party position, rather than suturing disparate coalitions, the strategy of choice was to engage in political purity.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: Introduction**

Following the reality of a Trump presidency in 2016 and the Unite the Right rally in 2017, the interrogation of contemporary ties between white nationalist political ideology and US mainstream politics has itself become more ‘mainstream’ within political and academic discourse. White supremacy in current mainstream politics is not an isolated event. Throughout the creation and maintenance of the idea of the United States, white supremacy has been central. Previous mythologies that depicted the US as ‘post-racial’ ignored that white supremacist politics in the United States are not an aberration, but a foundational feature. However, because of the instability of racial hegemony, whiteness and white supremacy require constant reification and as such, understanding white supremacist political strategies in previous periods of contention may provide insight into our own percolating fascism (Omi and Winant 2016; Painter 2019).

Like our contemporary turmoil, the mid-twentieth century marked a critical shift in the racial ideology of the state and of civil society. Scholars have covered the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan and other white supremacist movements and organizations during the Civil Rights Era, but few have discussed the role of third parties in re-entrenching white supremacy (Blee 2018; Diamond 1995; Feagin 2012; McVeigh and Estep 2019; Redding 2003; Vallery 2004; Zeskind 2009). To better understand the reification of white supremacy during times of crisis, we must look to the full spectrum of political participation. The critical question is, how did white supremacist political parties in the mid-twentieth century shape their rhetoric to articulate their constituency? And further, how does a minor party’s position in the political field, center or margin, affect their political articulation?

To illustrate the articulation strategies used by white supremacist political parties during this period, I focus on two cases. The first case, the States' Rights party or Dixiecrats, represent white supremacist political actors embedded in mainstream politics. Originating from the Southern Democrats, the Dixiecrats formed in reaction to Truman's minor expansion of civil rights for African Americans in 1948. The Dixiecrats retaliated by splitting from the Democratic party and creating a new third party. The second case, The National States' Rights Party, was grassroots white supremacists seeking to 'awaken' other whites via political campaigning. The National States' Rights Party (NSRP) formed in 1958 as the result of a merger of smaller white nationalist state parties. They were a well-documented white nationalist political party that emerged ten years after the dissolution of the Dixiecrats, and one of few grassroots white supremacist third parties to run a multi-state presidential campaign in the mid-twentieth century.

To clarify, I define these parties as white supremacist because they explicitly state their primary mission as either maintaining legalized racial apartheid or argue that a white supremacist hierarchy is biologically justified and thus necessitates an all-white ethno-state. White supremacy is a political, economic, and socio-legal system that categorizes individuals as 'white' or not, and in turn arranges society to benefit those in the 'white' category. Non-whites are violently oppressed to secure the benefits of whiteness and to maintain the illusory boundary between racial categories. I do not use white supremacy interchangeably with white nationalism, which is the more specific ideology that frames white supremacy as rightfully inherent to 'white' nations and settler colonial nation-states. White nationalist ideology also encompasses a hyper-nationalist orientation toward 'white' nation-states that adhere to a white supremacist social hierarchy and serve white supremacist outcomes, or desire such a society.

In a comparison of the rhetoric of both white supremacist political parties, I argue for an extension of political articulation theory that will account for the differences found between the parties. Despite each being marginal and sharing a focus on Southern voters who were likely to vote Democratic, their origins and access to media differentially shaped their articulation strategies. The Dixiecrat's proximity to the political center via their well-known presidential candidate, the South Carolina governor, along with easier access to media platforms created the strategic opportunity for a minor party to articulate across political blocs. The NSRP, having a grassroots origin and no apparent mainstream connections, was legislatively blocked from utilizing the equal-time clause for access to media and was infrequently covered by mainstream newspapers. Though the NSRP did nominate Orval Faubus, a well-known Arkansas governor, he shunned association with the party, stopping at an outright refusal of the nomination. In contrast to the Dixiecrats, the NSRP did not seek to appeal across difference. Rather, they sought to solidify and expand their foundational base of like-minded segregationists to re-entrench cultural appeals to white supremacy and white Christian nationalism.

## **Theoretical Grounding**

### *White Nationalism in the U.S.*

Despite explicit ties between political power and white supremacy in the United States, white supremacist political parties remain a vastly understudied facet of US society. Though white nationalism and white supremacist groups have been covered widely, white nationalist political parties have been largely left out of the conversation or under-utilized as an analytical locus. Much of the literature on white supremacist political participation views white nationalism primarily under a broader social movement lens, which is an essential but not a holistic view.

The most widely recognized studies of white supremacists include works that illustrate the patriarchal nature of white supremacy through interviews of women in the Ku Klux Klan (Blee 1991), and the role of white women in massive resistance (McRae 2018). Abby Ferber has also been significant in creating a framework for white supremacist patriarchal rhetoric and the construction of whiteness (1998)<sup>1</sup>. Christianity as a foundation of US white nationalism has been covered as well (Berry 2017; Burlein 2002; Dobratz and Shanks-Meile 2000; Gorski and Perry 2022), along with the convergence of veterans and paramilitarism in the white power movement (Belew 2018). Other vital works seek to track lineages through white nationalist and far right organizations (Diamond 1995; Michael 2008; Ridgeway 1995; Zeskind 2009). Yet surprisingly few look specifically at the convergence of electoral politics and white nationalism in the United States.

This lacune has not gone unnoticed. In an edited volume, Kathleen M. Blee acknowledged that despite the increase of research in right-wing movements and racism, much work remains. Blee noted that “the visibility and strength of organized racism has been particularly surprising in the 2016 presidential election, considering racial extremists have been hostile to electoral politics in recent decades. As racial extremism continues to change, we need studies that are attuned to its new forms and that can get inside its evolving agendas” (Blee 2018: 163). Blee is both recognizing that white nationalism and electoral politics need further inquiry, and that the relationship between the two is not static. A historical analysis would not be remiss in addressing this gap, and focusing on white supremacist parties and electoral politics can prove fruitful in shaping our understanding of white nationalist politics and right-wing movements.

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<sup>1</sup> Ferber also includes the rhetoric used by the National States’ Rights Party in her analysis but does not discuss electoral politics specifically. The political rhetoric of the NSRP is generally not differentiated from white supremacy more broadly in her analysis.

White nationalist politics have not gone entirely unaddressed in the literature. The work by Rory McVeigh and Kevin Estep expands our knowledge of white nationalism and political activity as a mode of resistance to social change (2019). Their work represents a step toward understanding the mutually constitutive nature of white nationalism and US political participation. McVeigh and Estep also provide a framework to identify the motivation behind white nationalist uprisings as various points of time in the United States. However, of the three periods that their research covers (1920s, 1960s, and 2016-present), the analysis that is presented for the 1960s is the least developed. Their ‘power devaluation model’ gives ample evidence to connect the 1920s Klan activity to the motivations behind Trump supporters, but the application of the model to the 1960s is lightly discussed and not as strongly correlated. Their focus also remains strictly on active and open Klan supporters despite the myriad other methods of white supremacist electoral resistance during the period. Their work on the mid-twentieth century can be further expanded by looking into white nationalist political party activity during the same period. Building an understanding for how white nationalists took advantage of or floundered under strong conditions for support are equally important.

The scholars Kathleen M. Blee and Annette Linden add an international comparison to the conversation with their work on women in white nationalist parties in the Netherlands compared with US women in white nationalist movements (2012). Their data was collected through biographies of women active in each country. Their project offers invaluable insight into how women make sense of their choices to join white supremacist movements despite or related to the individuals in their immediate social network. Their research gives vital information on the pathways of women into and out of extremism, and the impact of gender and culture on activism. Unfortunately, the scholars were not able to gather information on US women in white

nationalist parties, but what they obtained from the Netherlands was equally instructive. They found that having infrastructure for a legally recognized political party made the white nationalists much more cognizant of the political front stage. Also, membership was much clearer and more difficult for members to hide compared to women in loosely recognized fluid organizations in the US. This evidence supports the notion that the path of electoral politics necessitates a particular response from the participants and provides a different perspective than that from broader social movement activism.

Political parties as a locus for understanding white nationalism in the US is useful in several ways. First, including political parties in discussions of white nationalism widens our understanding of how white nationalist ideology is mediated in the relationship between state and civil society. Political parties must clearly delineate their ideological positions on matters of interest to possible voters, which tells us how white supremacists perceive society at a specific point in time and how that affects their chosen rhetorical strategies. Second, white nationalists use parties as a means of shaping the public's perception of themselves; the parties can use participation in democratic electoral processes as a veil of legitimacy for their movement. Third, and most important, the use of political parties is an avenue for white nationalists to disseminate their rhetoric and offers direct access to legislative power if political office is achieved. Even when losses may be inevitable, the campaigning process itself is an avenue to defining an agenda and crafting a message that can outlast an election season.

### *Political Parties*

Scholarship on electoral politics in sociology had declined significantly following the 1960s but is increasingly being revisited by sociologists. Contemporary scholarship is varied and

has included studies on youth political participation in elections (Fisher 2012); voting behavior, policy preferences, and public opinion (Brooks 2006; Manza and Brooks 2012). It also includes a new wave of scholars fighting to bring political parties back to sociology (Mudge and Chen 2014; de Leon et. al. 2015). Stephanie L. Mudge and Anthony S. Chen contend that sociology has wrongly surrendered the study of political parties to political science, and that as a discipline sociology has forgotten its strong history of research in the subfield (2014).

Mudge and Chen proceed to outline how our discipline has made vital contributions in the past, and they offer potential lines of inquiry for future sociological studies on political parties. Of the proffered lines of inquiry, two are particularly useful to this study. One is to “place parties in politics.... How are parties embedded in dynamic political interrelationships with state and society? Where do parties fit into the larger political system?” (Mudge and Chen 2014: 321) White supremacist third parties can add to our understanding of the political field, and in addition, expand our knowledge of how racial ideology is deployed by parties within the field. The second line of suggested inquiry is to embed “parties in time,” and to explore “how parties fit into the analysis of performative practices in party politics, political identity formation, the decline and transformation of parties” (Mudge and Chen 2014: 322). The period covered in this project, 1940s to 1960s, includes the period of realignment as well as a shift in US racial ideology. Through the case study of the Dixiecrats and the NSRP, we can better understand how these shifts influenced the creation of specific third parties, and the parties’ strategies in this temporal context.

Other important sociological scholarship on parties is that of Mildred A. Schwartz, who incorporated the concept of ‘party movements’ to the literature (2006). The concept uses an organizational theory framework to analyze third parties and their chosen survival strategies

within particular environment contexts. Schwartz defines a party movement as an organization that “no matter how radical their goals or how willing to use noninstitutional means, are still prepared to work within the system like any political party because they see government office as the most direct way of achieving their objectives” (Schwartz 11). Schwartz also urges scholars to not overlook third party attempts, “regardless of how long they last or how well they perform, third parties are important because they ‘affect the content and range of political discourse, and ultimately public policy, by raising issues and options that the two major parties have ignored’” (Schwartz 2006:10).

The work from Cedric de Leon, Manali Desai, and Cihan Tuğal has been pivotal in the call to reincorporate political parties into political sociology. Their concept, political articulation, provides an essential framework for party analyses. De Leon et. al. define political articulation as “*The process by which parties ‘suture’ together coherent blocs and cleavages from a disparate set of constituencies and individuals, who, even by virtue of sharing circumstances, may not necessarily share the same political identity*” (de Leon et. al. 2015:2) [italics in original]. Political articulation occurs through a process of bringing together constituents through ‘means of articulation’ (de Leon et. al. 2015:2). Political articulation is a strategic mechanism for political parties and was fundamental in conceptualizing the strategies and rhetoric of white nationalist third political parties in this study.

### *White Supremacy and Electoral Politics*

The re-emerging sociology of parties is vital for expanding research in the political sphere and is fertile ground to cultivate the burgeoning interest in sociological analyses of white nationalism and political articulation. Cedric de Leon has been at the forefront of much of the

recent scholarship in this intersection. Previously, de Leon et. al. have also discussed the Dixiecrat campaign in their application of political articulation, citing them as failed articulation in competition with the rise of New Deal growth liberalism (2009). Here I give further attention to the party by analyzing their political articulation rhetoric and their field position in comparison with another white nationalist political party of the period. De Leon further expanded on political articulation and ethnic nationalism in *Crisis!*, which details the causes and consequences of major political parties' crises in hegemony (2019). De Leon highlights a racial logic inherent in US crisis sequences that begin with "the failure to deliver on the promise of white privilege," and so, every cycle "call[s] into question...a racialized economic order that distributes power and resources unevenly across social groups" (de Leon 2019:156). Jonnie Lotesta with Cedric de Leon also tout the utility of political articulation in analyzing Trump's, thus far, successful articulation of ethnic nationalism in US politics (2020).

Prior influential works have also sought to understand the relationship between race, nation, and electoral processes. A foundational text on the matter, *Making Race and Nation* by Anthony W. Marx, compared the political outgrowth in countries that were founded on white supremacy: United States, Brazil, and South Africa (1998). Marx argues that in each, white supremacy acted as a uniting force for the birth and growth of the nation-state. The follow up work by Kent Redding (2003), critiqued Marx for his focus on race as motive without inclusion of the social context or mechanism to explain timing. Redding focused on North Carolina as a case study to understand the role of "political mobilization processes as precursors to race-making institutions and policies" (Redding 2003:137). Richard M. Valelly (2004) compared the significance of coalition-making and political institutions in the failures and successes of the first and second reconstruction. His work also incorporates the role of white supremacists and third

parties in the mid-twentieth century but focused primarily on their role in concert with major parties and institutions, rather than the strategies of the parties themselves, as discussed here.

Scholars have covered essential ground in building our knowledge of white supremacist social movements, organizations, institutions, and political parties. A strong theoretical base exists regarding white supremacist movements in the US, but less so for white supremacists' electoral participation. The literature that does analyze white supremacist electoral politics focuses largely on either the Reconstruction era or the Trump era. The scholarship in the Civil Rights Era is robust, but is centered primarily on white supremacist organizations, such as the KKK, and movements rather than white supremacist political parties. My focus on white supremacist third parties during the civil rights movement is to understand their political articulation in the third-party context as well as to highlight the political strategies used in white supremacist electoral politics during times of political instability. This paper is a redress to the dearth of knowledge on white supremacists who chose to create political parties during the mid-twentieth century. In addressing this gap, I find a difference in the rhetoric of white supremacist political parties temporally, from the 1940s to the 1960s, and in the articulating strategies when comparing center to marginal political positionality of the parties. My discussion of political articulation theory in relation to the parties also uncovers the counterintuitive strategy of the minor party to consolidate their base rather than cohering disparate voting blocs.

## **Methods**

I use both primary and secondary sources in my analysis of the rhetorical strategies of each party. For the Dixiecrats, I draw from sixty-one primary documents of the available

speeches and public statements from Strom Thurmond during the 1948 election campaign. These are located at the online repository of the Institute of Strom Thurmond at Clemson University. To provide context on the reception of the party from broader society, I also analyzed newspaper mentions of the party using ProQuest Historical Newspapers and the New York Times Archive; the date range was January 1948 to January 1949. For the NSRP, primary documents include their party newsletter, 'The Thunderbolt,' FBI documents focusing exclusively on the party, and campaign materials retrieved from the Hall-Hoag collection at Brown University. The Thunderbolt ran from 1958-1983, and I was able to access copies from the Harvard University collection as well as the Hall-Hoag collection. However, my access to the copies of The Thunderbolt were not for the entire run. I was able to access the prints starting from 1958, including the inaugural newsletter, into the 1970s, but each year did not have a representative newsletter for every month. The Hall-Hoag collection also included personal letters from Edward Fields to subscribers, protest flyers, campaign stickers, and a hard copy of their 1959 constitution and bylaws. A review of newspapers was performed for the NSRP as well, using the same databases with the date range January 1958 to January 1965.

## **Background**

### *The Creation of the Dixiecrats*

In the view of Democratic Senator Richard B. Russell, "The Democratic Party has always stood for states' rights and white supremacy, and for this reason the southern people have given it their unswerving and devoted support" (Stephenson et. al. 1995:79). Despite the party's longtime white supremacist stance, civil rights reforms were officially added to the party platform at the 1948 Democratic convention. Truman, the face of these reforms, was nominated

as the Democratic presidential candidate for the same election cycle. Once the results were announced, the entire Mississippi delegation and part of the Alabama delegation walked out of the convention (Bartley 1969). In retaliation, Southern Democrats rallied together to form the States' Rights Democratic Party or the Dixiecrats<sup>2</sup>. At the States' Rights Party convention in Birmingham, held a few months after the Democrat convention and attended by about 7,000 participants, Governor Strom Thurmond was endorsed as the presidential candidate and Governor Fielding L. Wright as the vice president (Key and Heard 1984).

The essential principle of the newly formed Dixiecrats was the right of states to uphold segregation, which they outlined in their official party platform: "We oppose and condemn the action of the Democratic Convention in sponsoring a civil rights program calling for the elimination of segregation, social equality by Federal fiat, regulations of private employment practices, voting, and local law enforcement."(<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu>) Drawing directly from the states' rights language of the Confederacy, the Dixiecrats aimed to portray the minor civil rights inclusion in the Democratic Party platform as an oppressive force stripping white men of their 'right' to legally maintain Jim Crow segregation.

Another point of ire was the use of FBI and state/local police to enforce desegregation laws. The Dixiecrat platform painted the enforcement of civil rights as fascism for Southern whites: "We call upon all Democrats and upon all other loyal Americans who are opposed to totalitarianism at home and abroad to unite with us in ignominiously defeating Harry S. Truman, Thomas E. Dewey and every other candidate for public office who would establish a Police Nation in the United States of America." (<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu>). Despite the stark rhetoric, they did not want to entirely abandon the Democratic Party but instead, force the party

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<sup>2</sup> The nickname for the party, 'Dixiecrats,' was coined in a newspaper article shortly after their formation (Stevenson et. al. 1995)

back to its segregationist roots by splitting the party in the 1948 election. The Dixiecrats sought to “resurrect the Compromise of 1877, by winning sufficient electoral votes to deny either major party candidate a majority in the electoral college and thus to place the selection of the President in the House of Representatives” (Bartley 1969:35).

The plan was to divert electoral votes by replacing the Democratic Party candidate on as many ballots as possible from Truman to Thurmond. The Dixiecrats were successful in replacing Truman as the Democratic Party candidate on the ballots in Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, and South Carolina (Key and Heard 1984). In the states where they were unable to replace Truman, they ran as a third party, the States’ Rights Democratic Party. Ultimately, the Dixiecrats were able to carry all four states where Thurmond was listed as the Democratic candidate and received one electoral vote from Tennessee, the final tally was 39 electoral votes and 1,169,021 individual votes (U.S. House of Representatives).

Following Truman’s victory, the Dixiecrats faced several setbacks. There was a drop in enthusiasm after their defeat, which negatively impacted party finances and political support, and five avowed Dixiecrats were expelled by the Democratic National Committee the next year (Bartley 1969; Leuchtenberg 2005). The Dixiecrats did maintain their yearly States’ Rights Conference for two more years, though attendance was dramatically lower by 1950 (Bartley 1969). Though the Dixiecrats were unable to secure a national victory and faced some backlash from the New Deal Democrats, their fight to sustain the legal structure of white supremacy was not over. The tension between integrationists and segregationists would only increase in the following years, though no longer under the banner of the Dixiecrats.

*Grassroots White Nationalists*

One of the white nationalist third parties to emerge after the Dixiecrats was the National States' Rights Party (NSRP) who had the most votes in a single presidential election of any grassroots white nationalist party in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The NSRP was formed out of the United White Party at a convention in Knoxville in 1957 by Edward Fields, J.B. Stoner, and Arthur Cole, and gained national recognition in 1958 when men suspected of a synagogue bombing in Atlanta claimed membership to their group (Cook 1962; George and Wilcox 1996). The NSRP denied connection to the individuals and the men were acquitted, but the NSRP gained a much larger audience than it had prior to the incident (FBI 1966). The NSRP was treated as a fringe group in newspaper articles initially, with one Washington Post article in 1958 referring to the group as “crackpots,” but coverage of the group increased in the following years, reaching its nadir in 1964 (Pearson 1958).

The perception of the NSRP is evident in the 1962 book, *The Segregationists*, by James Graham Cook who included the party in their “survey of some representative citizens (or ‘specimens,’ if you insist) of the South who are fighting— *and so far, effectively fighting*— to preserve racial segregation” (Cook 1962:7) [italics in original]. Cook interviewed Edward Fields and chairwoman Ann Bishop as representatives of the NSRP. Cooks’ interview uncovers the rationale behind the formation of the NSRP, and their reason for pursuing electoral politics. Fields explained that entering electoral politics is the only true route to power: “The Citizen’s Council organization is very worthwhile, but it’s not a political movement— and neither is the Klan. The only way we [the white man] can win an ultimate victory is through the political action of a third party” (Cook 1962:183). The ‘ultimate victory’ used here is not elaborated any further but could refer to obtaining power in the executive branch or achieving a white ethno-state in the United States. A quote from Fields points to the latter: “We of the National States

Rights party don't choose to visualize the possibility that there will be no blond children in the future. I want to go to my grave knowing that a thousand years from now a blond child will be born" (Cook 1962:186).

Fields, a central figure in the party, began his career with extreme right politics in Atlanta at the age of fourteen when he became a supporter of a short-lived fascist group called the Columbians (Zeskind 2009; Cook 1962). The Columbians' influence can be seen in the logo used by the NSRP, a thunderbolt encased in a white circle with a red and blue 'x' behind it. The thunderbolt references the Nordic god Thor, and the NSRP refers to the thunderbolt as an "ancient symbol of the White Race." (Cook 1962:172) The Columbians used a very similar logo of a thunderbolt encased in a circle to reference their belief that white people originated in Scandinavia, and proximity to this heritage signals proximity to 'pure' whiteness (Weisenburger 2003). Despite the overt connections to prior Nazi groups, Fields sought to distance the NSRP from claims of Nazism in his interview claiming, "The Nazi Party in Germany was a socialist party, the NSRP is opposed to socialism in every form. Ours is a conservative movement. We believe in free enterprise, free elections, and free political parties; I'd like to see fifteen parties in America." (Cook 1962:186)

Though the NSRP existed from 1958 to 1984, they only ran presidential candidates in 1960 and 1964. The 1960 campaign was their most successful. Their presidential candidate Governor Orval Faubus received .07% of the vote or 44,984 votes (U.S. House of Representatives; Diamond 1995). The 1964 candidate was John Casper, a long-time member and lawyer for the party (and many KKK chapters), who was only able to capture 6,953 votes in that presidential election (U.S. House of Representatives). Though the group lost their bid in the electoral sphere, they continued the violent rallies, riots, and protests against integration (FBI

1966, 1970). They also continued their publication ‘The Thunderbolt’ until the arrest of Fields and J.B. Stoner in 1984 for their involvement in a church bombing from 1958 (Diamond 1995).

## **CHAPTER TWO: White Supremacist Parties and Political Articulation**

Political articulation is the process utilized by political parties to cohere incongruent interests and identities into sociopolitical blocs, which then create social cleavages that become the basis for blocs of support for said parties (de Leon et. al. 2009). This framing remakes parties into agentic actors in society with their own agendas, rather than hollow institutions that merely reflect politicians’ or social movements’ aims. The scholars de Leon et al. define political articulation as:

*The process through which party practices naturalize class, ethnic, and racial formations as a basis of social division by integrating disparate interests and identities into coherent sociopolitical blocs. Cleavages, therefore, are only the possible differences among actors who populate the social; they do not naturally carry a political valence, but may be deployed by parties to aggregate majorities [italics in original] (de Leon et. al. 2009:194).*

Political articulation is “crucial during times of major social transformation,” because political parties are key in creating historically specific social formations reproduced via logics constituted by political parties (de Leon et. al. 2009: 194). Stated differently, political parties forge particular social formations, especially during times of major social transformation, and create logics for these formations that they then reproduce. Applying this concept to the cases of white supremacist third parties offers a clearer understanding of whether, how, and to what aim minor parties also use political articulation.

### The Case of the Dixiecrats (1948)

The official Dixiecrat campaign was a mere few months, but that did not prevent the party from developing a concrete platform and strategy to make the most of their limited time.

Thurmond was able to lean on his political knowledge from gubernatorial campaigns and laid the groundwork for the presidential campaign messaging months before they officially announced their run. Through an analysis of the political speeches given by Thurmond, and official campaign materials, two themes emerge. One is the appeal to racial moderates that sought to suture voters who were staunchly segregationist along with voters that claimed to support racial equality, but only via state legislation. The second was an appeal across class, wherein party rhetoric was aimed at business owners and individual workers, along with a broad appeal to poverty alleviation rather than integration.

#### *Appeals to Segregationists and Moderate Whites*

A key strategy used by Thurmond was to not only make appeals to whites who were staunchly segregationist, but also to whites who were more politically moderate in their views of segregation. To better define the political beliefs that would constitute a racial moderate in 1948, it is useful to review the attitudinal survey data for the corresponding period. A compilation of such reports on attitudinal trends between 1942 and 1963 was produced by Mildred A. Schwartz for the National Opinion Research Center in 1967 and provides more detail for whites' beliefs regarding integration (Schwartz 1967). A survey from 1948 asked the question, "Do you think Negroes should or should not be required to occupy a separate part of a train or bus when traveling from one state to another?" (Schwartz 1967:80). The national sample had a roughly split 50% agree/disagree response rate. A further question, also from 1948, asked "What kinds of people would you prefer not to work with?", and about 75% of the national sample selected the response 'Negro' (Schwartz 1967:77). Though anti-blackness was not wavering, support for

legislated segregation was not overwhelmingly approved. However, as expected, stark regional differences between North and South were also evident.

Earlier attitudinal surveys contained additional regional data about the participants. A survey question from 1942 asked “If a Negro were hired to work alongside of you, would it make any difference to you?” (Schwartz 1967:77). Less than 30% of respondents from the North claim that it would, and about 70% of those in the South also responded that it would. A similar work integration question from 1944 was “If a Negro had the same job as you at the place where you worked, would it be alright with you?” (Schwartz 1967:77). About 25% of Southerners answered affirmatively compared to about 75% of Northerners. Another question from 1944 asked “Do you think some restaurants in this town should serve both Negro and white people?” (Schwartz 1967:80). Among Southerners with a grade school education, 5% responded favorably, 7% with a high school education, and 20% with a college education. Among Northerners with a grade school education, 53% responded positively, 57% with a high school education, and 68% with a college education.

Considering the low rate of support among white Southerners for racial integration across areas of work, public transportation, and public accommodations, a racially moderate position would be less likely to support integration but may justify their beliefs in a manner to distance themselves from white supremacists. The rhetoric of a racially moderate position in this period is exemplified in a press release of a letter of support sent to Strom Thurmond from North Carolina resident John D. Langston, who was described as a prominent North Carolinian in the release (10-27-1948). Langston states his position on civil rights as such:

So far as the merit of a large part of the Civil Rights program is concerned, I confess that I am in considerable sympathy with it. I have no racial prejudices. But, those are matters entirely for the separate states and while exact justice may be delayed in some cases, I have no doubt that in the aggregate justice will be better served if majorities in states are not having unwelcome programs rammed down their throats

with the inevitable sequence of bitterness and hatred toward minorities. If I were of a minority group, I would prefer the American way of development through the States' Rights principle (10-27-1948:2).

Importantly, Langston begins his letter by distancing his position from claims of racism. Rather he frames the argument as one that is solely legislative and serving a higher purpose—maintenance of the 'States' Rights principle'—than the inconvenience of segregation, as he seems to view the matter. He goes on to outline his conviction that the issue at hand is the potential increase in federal centralization necessary to enforce integration, but not integration in theory. Langston is not openly arguing that segregation is justified on the grounds of white racial superiority, but that if the laws should change it should come from within and on an undefined timetable that merely gestures at some future point. It would be remiss to not recognize the threat in this statement as well. Langston's reference to the "inevitable sequence of bitterness and hatred" that he predicts will follow the passage of civil rights legislation serves a dual purpose. First, it rhetorically shifts the root of whites' anger to the legislative changes coming from without, rather than integration itself. Second, it operates as a threat against Black Americans who supported and fought for these changes.

The strategic use of the racially moderate position framed in the letter of support above is also evident in a particularly poignant moment at the start of the campaign. Initial coverage of the convention on July 17<sup>th</sup>, 1948, which named Strom Thurmond as presidential candidate for the party, highlighted the white supremacist speeches that were given at the convention by multiple speakers. One quote reprinted on the New York Times front page coverage of the event was by an unnamed speaker who stated that civil rights legislation represents "'threats to make Southerners into a mongrel, inferior race by forced intermingling with Negroes.'" (Popham 1948). Two days later, Thurmond held a telephone press conference that was reported by multiple newspapers, including the New York Times, in which he reiterated the racial moderate

frame and explicitly denounced white supremacists. The New York Times article was titled “Thurmond, Candidate of Rebels, Decries ‘White Supremacy’ Idea,” and detailed Thurmond’s response that he was “‘a progressive Southerner’” who was “‘perturbed at the attitude of some of his followers on the subject of ‘white supremacy.’” (Popham 1948). The same article further explains:

In the South Governor Thurmond has never been linked in ideological views with liberal leaders.... At the same time he has not been an advocate of ‘white supremacy’ tenets....It appeared that Governor Thurmond was seeking to clamp the lid on purveyors of bigotry who attended the nominating convention here and whose records of race hatred appear likely to make the political road ahead rough (Popham 1948).

Another headline by the Washington Post regarding the event, “Top Dixiecrat has ‘Southern Liberal’ Views,” (Lesesne 1948) and an accounting by the Associated Press quoted Thurmond responding that “‘we do not invite, we do not need, the support of Gerald L. K. Smith or any other rabble rousers who use race prejudice and class hatred to inflame the emotions of our people,’” and that the party “‘is not based on racial hate nor racial prejudice’” (AP 7-20-1948). Thurmond would have many such moments throughout the campaign that necessitated some distancing from segregationists who openly embraced white supremacist racial ideology, with the intention of avoiding the alienation of ‘racial moderate’ voters. Yet, this strategy still required a balance where the ‘rabble rousers,’ as he refers to them, would also find their beliefs reflected in the party rhetoric.

Another incident that highlighted the duality of his appeals, was the response to a publicization of a letter of invitation to the governor’s mansion in South Carolina sent by Thurmond’s clerk to the Governor of the Virgin Islands, William H. Hastie, the first Black man in that position in the islands. Thurmond’s response includes the explanation that the letter was sent to all absent governors from a recent conference and that he did not know that Hastie was a

Black man when he was included in the list. He first used this moment to reiterate the racial moderate frame:

Those of us engaged in this campaign for constitutional government and state sovereignty have refused to permit racial issues to dominate our appeal for support. We have taken the broad position that the over-all issue involved was preservation of local self-government, as guaranteed to the states by the constitution. We have insisted that any weakening of their constitutional framework in this regard would be detrimental not only to the white and Negro races but to all minority groups who have found refuge within our shores (Thurmond 10-25-1948:1).

He characterizes the campaign goal as protecting the constitution against those seeking to weaken it for autocratic aims and political power grabs, namely the Truman/Northern Democrats. He is sidestepping the claims that the party is white supremacist and insisting that the central mission is to maintain state sovereignty, which in-turn will benefit everyone across race. Yet, he reiterates his commitment to segregation later in the same statement: “Governor Hastie knows that neither he nor any other Negro will ever be a guest at the Governor’s house in Columbia as long as I am Governor or as long as the Democratic Party of South Carolina continues to elect the Governors of my state.” (10-25-1948:2). Here he is making clear that his allusions to refuge and a peaceful coexistence indeed have boundaries. The next sentence crossed out by hand continued, “And furthermore, if I am elected President, one of my first official acts will be to remove Governor Hastie and appoint a white man in his place so as to remove this embarrassment to the Governors’ Conference in forcing upon the Conference a Negro who was made Governor of the Virgin Islands not by an election but by Presidential mandate.” (10-25-1948:2). Perhaps Thurmond decided against including the sentence because it was much more explicit in the enforcement of a white racial hierarchy and would contradict their gestures at a potentially integrated future.

*Appeals Across Class*

Alongside the Dixiecrats' attempts to suture 'racially moderate' whites and white supremacists, the party also crafted rhetoric to appeal to whites across the class spectrum. The threat of Truman creating a permanent Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) was central to the strategy for speaking to different economic positions of white voters. In using the FEPC to outline his position, Thurmond was able to speak to working class whites as well as white business owners. A statement made in response to the committee report from the President's Committee on Civil Rights illustrates the use of this frame. He first details his opposition to the varied laws that encompass civil rights legislation and then claims that the FEPC "applies as much to our labor organizations as to our businesses and industries....The bureaus and commissions created by it would be given power to harass and interfere with business, large and small, and to intrude into the policies and practices of labor unions." (3-31-48:3). In a later speech, Thurmond extended the argument to the ability to maintain segregated unions, by claiming that the FEPC would "destroy the right of working men to choose jobs where they can work with people they like. It would deny them the right to limit the membership of their unions because of race, color, or creed." (9-23-1948:8). The references to labor unions along with businesses speaks across the spectrum of class.

He also directed his rhetoric toward individual white workers. In a campaign speech made at a watermelon festival in North Carolina, he used the FEPC as a looming threat to white workers in their everyday lives:

If the Commission forces him to hire such persons, and if his employes [sic] object to working with them, then the Commission is empowered to take court action against each and every employee who objects. This could mean that a man working in a mill could be sent to jail or be forced to give up his job if he refused to work beside someone he did not like. (Thurmond 7-31-1948:7)

As mentioned previously, the NORC survey in 1944 found that only about 25% of southerners approved of working in an integrated workplace, so this statement likely found great resonance in the audience.

Other overtures made to working class voters, outside of the threat of the FEPC, were in regard to poverty more broadly. In the same statement responding to President Truman's committee on civil rights, Thurmond also argues that "a little more practical help on economic lines, and a little less fallacious racial theory, would accomplish a great deal more for the improvement of the level of life and opportunity of all our people of whatever race." (3-31-48:4) The same sentiment was also expressed in an earlier motion made at the southern governor's conference: "Economic under-privilege in the South has known no color line; it has fallen heavily on all races alike...and it will be as a result of the solution of our economic problems that our racial problems will disappear." (2-7-48:1). Framing the issue of poverty as not racially specific serves the purpose of appealing to working class whites while also speaking to racial moderates.

When the election came in November, the Dixiecrats did not gain enough electoral votes to win the presidency, as they knew was likely, and they were eighty-eight electoral votes shy of causing a referendum to throw the election to congress—their true aim. Their political articulation failed if we consider the presidency to be the final victory, but the electoral votes gained is not insignificant. Their articulation did resonate in the four southern states that they carried and inspired the NSRP in the following decade.

## The Case of the National States Rights Party (1958-1964)

In contrast to the Dixiecrats, the NSRP did not have a prior connection to mainstream politics. The NSRP instead arose from individuals associated with white supremacist organizations and other minor parties rather than mainstream political parties. The party remained in the margin throughout their tenure, and at times served as a representative of extreme politics in mainstream political rhetoric (Adams 1960; Cook 1962; Pearson 1958; US Congressional Record 1964:12557). However, the NSRP drew inspiration from the Dixiecrats, and viewed their loss in 1948 as a pivotal moment in US politics in need of redress: “If the South had won the balance of power in 1948, the race-mixing conspiracy would have been stopped.... We would now have 100% Race Segregation in the South instead of racial chaos” (Oct. 1960:1). The NSRP imitated the Dixiecrat electoral strategy for their 1960 and 1964 presidential campaigns as well. They discuss the ‘balance of power’ as their target rather than an outright electoral victory: “We almost won with Thurmond in 1948 and we can win with Faubus in 1960...even though we are on the ballot in only a few states, we can win the election by winning the BALANCE OF POWER” (10-1960:1) [capitalization in original].

However, coming from a marginal political position limited their access to traditional media, and therefore their ability to broadcast their message using far-reaching media outlets, which reduced their means of articulation. In 1960, minor parties experienced direct congressional interference in their media presence. Congress passed legislation that suspended the FCC Equal Time Rule, which would have given the minor party candidates access to presidential debates (Title 47 § 151). Prior to the suspension, the NSRP was clear about their intentions of using the rule to their advantage. In their first issue of *Thunderbolt*, they stated,

Recent rulings of the Federal Communications Commission have held that any man on the ballot in two or more states in a Presidential election must be given equal time with any other candidate who

receives time on T.V. and radio. Therefore, getting Admiral Crommelin on the ballot will be the key to carrying [sic] the Racial Nationalist message to all 48 states (7-1958:1).

Instead, congress suspended Section 315 of the Communications Act of 1934 and amended the act in such a way where media outlets could exclude third party candidates much easier than previously (Title 47 U.S. Code § 315). Television and radio broadcasts of the presidential election debates were then able to legally restrict access to only Democratic and Republican candidates.

Despite their desire to widely broadcast party rhetoric, the NSRP represents a case of minor party politics that do not cleanly align with the political articulation model. Throughout the rhetoric and actions of the NSRP, we see instead a party that is appealing to a very specific constituency and is narrowly focused on a singular issue. Importantly, the appeals are not to disparate groups but those who align with their own interests and ideals, without exception. Their primary focus was building their base by appealing to white Christian nationalists, rather than articulating multiple political blocs to themselves. This attempt to concentrate on one bloc is evident in their rhetoric and corresponding political actions, which largely fall under three themes: white Christian nationalism, conspiracy theories, and white repression/awakening.

### *White Christian Nationalism*

The most foundational ideology for the NSRP is white Christian nationalism, and consequently this is a central rhetorical theme. The framing of the party itself as white Christian nationalist began the onset, and is clearly stated in their first party constitution:

We of the National States Rights Party believe in the Christian heritage of our people, the White race and the Nation which the Whiteman created out of the wilderness of this continent. We believe in the principles laid down by our forefathers in the United States Constitution and in the Bill of Rights contained therein (Constitution 1959:1).

The narrative of the creation of the United States here includes multiple points that are the cornerstone of white Christian nationalism, particularly the idea of a ‘Christian heritage,’ whites creating ‘civilization’ out of ‘wilderness,’ and the invocation of the US Constitution as a product of white lineage. The scholars Gorski and Perry (2022) define white Christian nationalism as a culmination of these beliefs, and they deepen their analysis to argue that at its core white Christian nationalism is based on three political ideals: the maintenance of social hierarchies, freedom from restrictions, and the use of violence to maintain said hierarchies. Specifically, “white Christian nationalism is entangled with the holy trinity of racial order, Christian freedom, and male violence” (Gorski and Perry 2022:67). While Gorski and Perry are primarily referring to American whites as a broad demographic rather than self-identified white supremacists necessarily, their definition succinctly outlines the ideological basis for the NSRP’s rhetoric and actions.

Central in their appeals is the placement of Judaism as the primary antagonism to Christianity. An early example is the framing of the trial of George Bright, an NSRP member and former Columbians member (1-1959:2; Hatfield 2020). Bright was charged in connection to a 1958 bombing of an Atlanta Synagogue that caused \$200,000 in damages, though no injuries, and his trial was in January 1959 (“5 Bombing Suspects Denied Bail in Atlanta”). In coverage of the event, the NSRP newsletter does not simply express anger, rather they compare the situation to the crucifixion of Jesus:

Seldom since the Jews crucified Christ has the issue between Good and Evil been more profound. On one side in that Atlanta courtroom stood everything that is clean, honest, upright and noble. On the other side was represented that which is filthy, cowardly, low and conniving (1-1959:2).

The individuals that were painted as ‘evil’ were the head prosecutor, whom they described as “of dubious ethnic background” with a “visage twisted with hate”, and an ADL (Anti-Defamation League) regional representative who was described as a “grotesque caricature of a human being”

(1-1959:3). Those on the side of ‘evil’ are not only ‘conniving’, a clear nod to Jewish stereotypes, but they are denied their humanity in total. The trial provided an opportunity to illustrate who the party defines as ‘us’ and ‘them;’ the ‘us’ being noble whites aligned with Jesus, and ‘them’ as non-Christian/Jewish caricatures of human beings. This is not only written as antipathy but as a struggle between good and evil, akin to a biblical fight.

Further party discourse on the inseparability of whiteness and Christianity is ubiquitous.

In an early slogan the party frames the maintenance of white purity as a directive from God:

SEPARATION OF THE RACES IS GOD’S PLAN [,] RACE MIXING IS THE COMMUNIST PLAN!  
Within the few words of this powerful slogan is the heart and soul of the White Cause. We work and fight not only as members of a political party, but we work and fight under the banner of God Almighty Himself (9-1961:5).

In this framing, the enforcement of integration and legalization of interracial relationships are precursors to white death, and the loss of white Christian political power. The religious mandate is the ‘heart and soul of the white cause,’ and the party members are foot soldiers for a white supremacist god. Different from the Dixiecrats, the NSRP sought to interpellate constituents who believed that white supremacy and white identity in and of itself is a cause for which to fight. Where the Dixiecrats minimized their white supremacy via arguments over legality, the NSRP openly claims white supremacy as their core mission. However, the grammatical choice of proper noun capitalization in ‘White Cause’ as in ‘God Almighty Himself’ also speaks to the equivalent importance they are placing on each.

Their religious ‘war’ for white supremacy is indelibly rooted in settler colonial American nationalism. In addition to the references in their constitution about the creation of the US, the party ties white Christian supremacy to American identity throughout their rhetoric. The term ‘patriot’ is often employed to mean one who openly aligns with their platform, “Patriots are sick and tired of following the old donkey and elephant parties down the mongrel road to oblivion.

They demand a ‘thunderbolt’ party that fights for Christianity, the White Race and America” (3-1960, inserted leaflet from the editor). Their ‘empty signifier’, ‘patriot,’ is also used to paint whites who do not support segregation as traitors to the nation. In his 1962 campaign for US Senator for Alabama, John G. Crommelin, an NSRP backed candidate and former NSRP vice presidential candidate in 1960, centered his platform on retaliation, “Nothing of a constructive nature can be done until vigorous courageous action by real American Whitemen is initiated and the dupes and traitors removed from Key Positions in the Federal Government” (3-1962:2). They frame ‘real’ white patriotic men as those with the courage to vote for Crommelin at the least, with subtle allusion to further possible action outside of the voting booth.

White Christian nationalism was explicitly the heart of the NSRP political campaign. It was used to frame party grievances, and to establish the legitimacy of their political ideals by highlighting the connection between the white supremacist legacy of the US and their own ambitions. White Christian nationalism was also a way to delineate the ‘us’ in their party movement, as well as the ‘them’. Defining who they were, why they existed, and who they represented outlined the basis for their fight.

### *Conspiracy Theories*

White Christian nationalist ideology defined who the party was and who they were seeking to interpellate to themselves. Conspiracy theories, ubiquitous in party rhetoric, served to link their foundational ideology with coeval shifts in the US political landscape. The theories held wide-ranging targets, but of primary significance they detailed how the party believed societal power was organized. Conspiracy theories were also used to validate their political goals and to argue for the need of a white nationalist party in the political sphere. The conspiracies also

served to reconcile the earlier civil rights legal successes with whites' inability to successfully quash the movement.

The party succinctly described their overarching theory of a dominant Jewish power structure and its connections to the civil rights movement when detailing their 'Christian message' in the 1962 Crommelin campaign for US Senate:

These ministers and Admiral Crommelin are managing 5 sound trucks all over the state blasting away the Christian message that Communism is Jewish from start to finish and that racial integration of we White people is a Jewish directed scheme to mongrelize the White Race, so that the almighty Jew can sit upon a throne to rule a world populated by a mass of mullato [sic] like zombies (4-1962:1).

Their rhetoric regularly referred to communism as a 'front' for Jewish political strategies to suppress whites, globally and domestically. However, the conspiracy theory of a global Jewish power syndicate seeking to destroy Christians or gentiles did not arise with the NSRP. Rather, it was likely the influence of the contemporaneously burgeoning Christian Identity movement, which was a fusion of American white nationalism with an older British ideology referred to as 'British-Israelism' or 'Anglo-Israelism' (Barkun 1997).

The British-Israel ideology argued that Anglo-Saxons were the *real* 'chosen' ones from Christian lore, and that Christian Britons and white Americans were descended from the ten lost tribes of the bible but were unaware of their lineage. Jewish groups were claimed to have instead descended from a less biblically important area of Israel (Barkun 1997). British-Israelism was first proposed in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, but in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, at the height of transatlantic slavery, this ideology became explicitly linked to white supremacy. In addition to claiming that Jews were not actually 'chosen,' they argued that Jews were in fact genetically impure because they had intermixed with gentiles after their exodus (Barkun 1997). Close to this period, an antiquated middle-ages belief was also integrated that branded Jews as the literal offspring of Satan who shared his goal of global domination (Barkun 1997).

This version of British-Israelism made its way into the U.S. in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and grew a larger following in the 1940s via Gerald L.K. Smith and his Christian Nationalist Crusade, along with popular religious figures who shaped their sermons around this theology (Barkun 1997). The NSRP's conspiracy theories about Jewish American's societal power directly mimics Christian Identity's core theology. Interestingly, the party rarely mentions the Christian Nationalist Crusade or other prominent Christian Identity figures. However, like the Dixiecrats, they did make a point of denigrating Gerald L.K. Smith, though for a very different reason. In a review of his book, *The Cross and the Flag*, they argue that Smith "attempts to whitewash the Jew controlled F.B.I" by portraying the F.B.I. as anti-communist, and they continue: "some time back you wrote us that, 'The FBI had some bad apples in it, but on the whole were all right.' I disagree, it is a Jew controlled, Red, Race-mixing outfit" (9-1959:3). Here the NSRP were seeking to distinguish themselves from other far-right figures to appeal to Christian Identity believers and position themselves as 'true' Christian nationalists, and Smith and others as soft and out-of-touch.

Not only did they view the FBI and other federal agencies (and JFK) as complicit in the Jewish-communist conspiracy, but the party also argued that local and national media suppressed reporting on NSRP political activity due to the same machinations:

The facts are that hundreds of States Rights people were marching for Gov. Faubus for President. That important news was suppressed from your newspaper. Perhaps, it was because the wire services—both A.P. and U.P.I.—are controlled by the same minority which controls your television networks and the motion picture studios. It is no wonder that our people are so badly brainwashed with communism and race mixing (8-1960:4).

To the party, their inability to garner the following they wanted was not a result of failed articulation but a result of larger powerful forces outside of their control. Using conspiratorial framing here worked to distance themselves from failure and allowed them to pivot their failures as further evidence of said conspiracy. The NSRP similarly used this argument to relieve their

cognitive dissonance between viewing Black people as inferior yet seeing success from Black resistance: “Atlanta is completely under the heel of the Jew-negro bloc machine...Always remember the Jew is the ‘brains’ behind all negro attacks on White Rights!” (10-1961:4) This conception of global/domestic/local power as Jewish dominance was crucial in laying the foundation for the third rhetorical theme of ‘white repression/awakening.’

### *White Repression/Awakening*

The final prominent theme in NSRP rhetoric was their appeal to whites who saw the civil rights movement as repression for whites or as a zero-sum game of political power; gains for Black Americans equaled a loss of power for whites. This sentiment was captured in a NORC survey in December of 1963, when a question regarding the goals of the civil rights movement found that ten percent of the national sample of whites selected ‘domination’ along with other goals (more than one goal could be selected). Of the participants who chose ‘domination,’ white “southerners with less than a college education most frequently expressed the beliefs that Negroes want to become superior, to gain control over the society, to take over, to obtain more than their share, or to receive preferential treatment” (Schwartz 1967:93). The same survey also asked participants who was behind recent civil rights actions, and the majority response for southerners of all education groups (grade, high, or college) selected the option ‘other person or group’. Of those participants who chose ‘other person or group,’ the majority identified communists as the group behind civil rights (Schwartz 1967).

These survey results closely resemble NSRP rhetoric. The NSRP was likely either aiming to interpellate these conspiratorially inclined southerners via an appeal to the loss of white power, or their rhetoric was working as intended. In this appeal, they unequivocally cast whites

as an underdog and victim responding defensively to attacks: “take an open stand for White Christian America, and an open stand against the Jews, communists, negroes, mongrels, and other race-mixers. **Why shouldn’t we be against them? They are against us**” (10/11-1964:2) [Bold in original]. It must be said that this is not a unique response to the legal gains achieved by Black Americans, however. During Reconstruction, for example, we saw similar framing of gains in equality as repression for whites (Peck 2019). The NSRP also used an exaggerated history of the reconstruction to stoke fear of the loss of white power:

To many misguided Northerners the term, ‘White Supremacy’ describes a hateful, un-American institution under which bigoted, prejudiced and ignorant Southerners oppress and abuse negroes, and otherwise deny them ‘equality’. But today there are still men and women living in the South who can remember the time when Northern radicals of another day imposed a regime of ‘BLACK SUPREMACY’ upon the South under which no Southern white man or woman could vote, hold office or enjoy citizenship (10-1961:4) [underlined and capitalized in original].

They framed the options as either the subjugation of Blacks or subjugation of whites, without room for a vision of shared governance.

Their portrayal of white victimhood also included the idea of ‘reverse-racism’ in parts of their rhetoric. In a letter to the editor published in the *Thunderbolt*, Roy Frankhouser, a Grand Dragon in the Reading, Pennsylvania KKK who was also affiliated with NSRP and the American Nazi Party (Jenkins 1997), used an alleged incident on a bus of a Black man hitting a white man to argue his point: “If the situation had been reversed and it had been the Whiteman who had hit the Negro for siting [sic] beside him, the ‘Birmingham News’ would have headlined the story on page one, charging the Whites with being prejudiced, brutal, intollerant [sic], etc., etc. They would have demanded the immediate arrest of the Whiteman on assault with intent to murder (the usual phony rap)” (6-1961:1). A few years later, the *Thunderbolt* published another screed by the same man responding to an upcoming supreme court trial regarding a citation against the NSRP for handing out leaflets: “These coming trials of States Righters are going to spark the real

resistance struggle. HOW DARE THEY ATTEMPT TO MAKE AN EXAMPLE OF THESE YOUNG MEN WHO SAY ‘WE WHITES HAVE RIGHTS, TOO’ (2-1964:1)[capitalization in original].

The party rhetoric did not only speak of white victimhood and grievance but used this strategically to rally white people in what they variously referred to as an ‘awakening’. The mission of the NSRP to ‘awaken’ whites to white nationalism was central to the party from the start. In the first issue of *the Thunderbolt*, they explicitly state that “more important then [sic] the actual number of votes polled...is the presenting of the truth to all White Americans. Even if a president knows the truth, he is unable to move unless the masses are also awake and behind such a president” (7-1958:1). They seem to be saying that having a white nationalist president alone is not sufficient to carry out their genocidal vision, but they must convince every other white American as well. This concept of a white awakening was also central to the party’s core symbology. The center of their flag held a thunderbolt, hence the publication name, and it was described as “the electrifying flash of light from the heavens... [a] sign of force which we will gather in the name of our awakened Whitefolk” (7-1958:2).

### **CHAPTER THREE: Political Articulation and White Unity**

Where the Dixiecrats had rather clear examples of attempts at suturing disparate groups, the NSRP proves a more difficult case. At every turn the party was winnowing down possible constituents to those who were ‘worthy’ of aligning with the party, yet still speaking of a united white bloc ‘awakened’ by their propagandizing. Despite the party’s marginal positioning in the political sphere, their strategy focused on articulating a specific constituency: white Christian

nationalists who were anti-communist, antisemitic, and ‘awakened’ to white supremacist conspiracy theories or open to an ‘awakening’.

Their constitution extends the mission of ‘awakening’ further, to whites in other nations: “It is our American Destiny to bring about the unity of the Whiteman’s World. The life-or-death threat of aroused non-whites affords the challenge which will close the ranks of the Whiteman’s World” (1959 constitution:14). The appeals to international white unity was not only rhetoric. In 1961, a party member flew to London to spend two weeks with the NSRP equivalent, the British Nationalist Party. In the personal account from the party member Robert E. Lyons:

I spent my time visiting racial nationalists, in their homes...[I] gained many new ideas which I can put to good use.... Before I left Britain, South Africa became a republic, so we had to demonstrate for South Africa...men [were] carrying large picket signs, mine said ‘Support White South Africa’, ‘Keep Britian White’, ‘BNP’. This whole masse [sic] marched through Trafalgar Square, Piccadilly Circus, and then to Hyde Park. After it was all over we hopped into the Land Rover, drove through London shouting in masse [sic] ‘Jews out’, ‘Keep Britian White’. It was truly great. We will have to do that in New York City (9-1961:5).

On the same page, Edward Fields included a message to the British nationalists: “The White man must unite with his White brother against our non-White enemies who seek to destroy the very seed of our people...our message of oneness for our people shall be carried to the four corners of the world” (9-1961:5).

In addition to their attempts to create white cultural unity abroad, the NSRP looked to the inculcation of white youth domestically as a tool for articulation. In August of 1962, the party announced a new school for white youth called the ‘NSRP School of Racial Studies and Leadership training.’ It sought to bring white youth together and train them to “be properly prepared to go forth and spread the message” with hopes to “provide every state in the Union...with well-trained leaders to build [the] Movement forward” (8-1962:4). The school would have acted as an indoctrination camp to reinforce white supremacy to children, and to create patronage for their party through future voters and the families of the children who would

presumably bring home their learned rhetoric. The NSRP claimed that the building would have living quarters and a classroom, and that Emory Burke would lead the school in building “the greatest Rights [sic] Wing, Anti-communist, Patriotic Movement in America” (8-1962:4). Emory Burke was originally associated with the white supremacist nazi sympathizer group, the Columbians, in the 1940s, and was the individual with whom Fields credited his own radicalization (4-1963).

Rather than building a coalition across disparate political blocs, the NSRP sought to interpellate to themselves conservative segregationist whites who had become disarticulated with the Democratic party following the inclusion of integration in their platform, along with white supremacist activists. The disarticulation was compounded by the failure of southern Democrats to win electorally in 1948, and their reintegration into the party tent. The southern Democratic politicians did not stop their fight against integration, but they did not have enough power or support in any of the three branches of government to roll back the civil rights gains. The NSRP sought to create a massive resistance that was not grounded in legal rationalizations for segregation, but violent cultural notions of white supremacy, whiteness, and nationalism. To do so, they eschewed the strategy of cohesion across difference and instead concentrated their efforts exclusively on conservative southern whites.

## **Conclusion**

Through the comparison of white supremacist political parties in the Civil Rights Era, we see important differences in their articulation strategies. In the Dixiecrats, we saw a third party who had ties to the political center and were nationally known. To stave off the momentum of the civil rights movement, the party and fellow southern democrats used the crisis period of

crumbling segregation to appeal to a coalition of racial moderates, segregationists, workers/labor unions, and business owners/capitalists. As discussed by de Leon et. al., this articulation was a failure at the national level but successful in the deep south (2009). However, expanding on de Leon et. al's analysis of the Dixiecrat campaign, cross-class racially moderate appeals were evident in the segregationist articulation. Their attempts to incorporate these appeals with segregationist support via a 'colorblind' states' rights agenda was ultimately a failure.

The case of the National States Rights Party offers an analysis of a grassroots marginal party who formed out of smaller white supremacist political organizations. This party, who formed ten years following the Dixiecrats did not mirror their articulation strategy. Despite their marginal position in the political field, they did not attempt cross-coalition appeals to expand support as expected. Instead, the NSRP chose to double down on their appeals to self-identified white supremacists, segregationists, and whites who were not yet 'awakened' to white Christian nationalist conspiracy theories. The NSRP used concentrating strategies to re-entrench whites' overt political support for a white supremacist nation. Perhaps they were reacting to the regional success of the Dixiecrats and chose to focus their efforts exclusively on southern pro-segregationists with the hope to induce a ripple effect of white support in other parts of the country. Thankfully, the NSRP failed electorally. They did not capture any state, including the deep south.

Though the NSRP did not attempt to suture disparate groups, they did utilize various means of articulation to advance a "chain of equivalence," or bundle of particular appeals, that sought to deepen social cleavages between pro-segregationist whites and the growing 'colorblind' racist discourse (Laclau 2005). Understanding their political strategy attempts remains fruitful, as "political innovations pioneered by marginal groups seeking power may shift

how movements and parties build, maintain, and mobilize support” (Redding 2003:11). The NSRP and segregationists lost to ‘colorblind’ New Deal growth liberalism, but their brand of white Christian nationalism has not died (de Leon et. al. 2009; Gorski and Perry 2022). In understanding what articulations were created during the previous crisis of racial hegemony in the Civil Rights Movement, we will perhaps be more prepared if adherence to the current ‘colorblind’ racial discourse begins to decay.

This study is not without limitations. In focusing solely on party rhetoric and state-level returns, it is more difficult to ascertain whether the strategies of either party were successful at the local level in specific state regions. Local level data could also be used to understand whether the NSRP’s violent rallies and protests were especially salient for voters, and if this negatively or positively affected their returns in the cities and towns where they occurred. Another potential area for future research would be the comparison of the NSRP strategies to other white supremacist organizations such as the White Citizen’s Council, and the burgeoning new conservative movement. Continuing the line of inquiry into historical white supremacist strategies is necessary, both in recognition of the indelible white supremacist core of the US and in respecting the ubiquitous quote, “the past is never dead. It is not even past” (Faulkner 1951:73).

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