THE RISE OF THE REPUBLICANS: PARTY REALIGNMENT IN
TWENTIETH CENTURY TEXAS

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This dissertation is a study of the political transformation of Texas during the twentieth century from a predominantly Democratic to a two-party state. It is commonly asserted that the fundamental conservatism of Texas voters led them to abandon the national Democratic Party as it embraced more liberal reforms. This shift led to a rise in support in Texas for the Republican Party, which continued to advocate a more conservative agenda. But this change demands a more thorough explanation at the local level, in part because such a study can also reveal other factors at work. This dissertation first examines how prohibition impacted the state’s political status quo and provided an opportunity for the Republican Party to increase its numbers. It then discusses the New Deal and the growth of Texas’s oil industry, and how government regulation shaped political developments. The impact of urbanization and suburbanization on Republican growth are also addressed, along with numerous campaigns that reflected the changes occurring in Texas’s electorate during this time. Although Dwight D. Eisenhower’s 1952 and 1956 wins in Texas were a strong indication of the realignment among Texas voters, it was John G. Tower’s election to the United States Senate that served as the first catalyst for the Republicans’ dream of a two-party state. Following the election of Tower, the Republicans faced setbacks from the landslide victory of Lyndon B. Johnson after the assassination of John F. Kennedy, followed by the Watergate scandal, but they managed
to rebound effectively. Thus, in addition to addressing the question of what spurred the rise of the Republican Party in Texas during the first half of the twentieth century, this dissertation provides more nuanced answers to the question of how Texas became a two-party state by 1988, which of course paved the way for a Republican triumph just ten years later.
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By

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Although the transformation of Texas from a predominantly Democratic to a two-party state by 1988 can be mainly attributed to Democratic Party divisions caused by the social, economic, and political changes during the second half of the twentieth century, it in fact had its roots in earlier splits within Texas’s Democratic Party. Like a majority of the nation’s southern states, Texas was a one-party state controlled by Democrats for most of the twentieth century. During the first two decades of the twentieth century, most Texans would have reacted to mention of the state’s Republican Party by stating that there was no such thing. Born out of the scattered Unionist sentiment during and after the United States Civil War, the Republican Party in Texas held power from 1869 to 1874, yet for nearly a century thereafter failed to win another statewide election for a Texas post. In his study of Texas’s Republican Party, *From Token to Triumph*, Roger M. Olien points out that by 1914 Texas’s Republican Party was so weak that it mustered fewer votes than the state’s Socialist Party and was essentially a historical remnant unable to challenge the Democrats for control of the state. By that time, however, prohibition had come to the forefront of the Progressive movement in Texas because, according to historian Norman D. Brown in *Hood, Bonnet, and Little Brown Jug*, it directly addressed most of the perceived social problems of the state. More importantly, in his study of the Progressive movement in Texas, *Progressives and Prohibitionists*, Lewis L. Gould
identifies prohibition as the “major divisive element” that separated Progressive and conservative Democrats during Woodrow Wilson’s presidency. Prohibition thus became the first major issue to provide an opportunity for the Texas Republican Party, whose revival through the remainder of the twentieth century has been discussed in part by many Texas historians, but not as a cohesive whole. ¹

The movement for statewide prohibition was strengthened by the formation of Texas’s Anti-Saloon League in 1907 and subsequent efforts by prohibitionists to add a statewide prohibition amendment to Texas’s constitution. In his masters thesis, “Progressivism/Prohibition and War: Texas, 1914-1918,” Mike Antle distinguishes the 1914 gubernatorial race as another promising moment for prohibitionists in Texas because prohibition candidate Tom Ball received the endorsement of President Woodrow Wilson. Wilson’s endorsement, however, was not enough to help defeat the anti-prohibitionist candidate “Farmer” Jim Ferguson, whose candidacy, according to Brown, further sharpened divisions within Texas’s Democratic Party between “wets” and “drys.” Brown also points out that not until the United States entered World War I did the “drys” win control of the state government from the “wets.” Antle’s thesis supports Brown’s position by depicting World War I as a catalyst for prohibitionists because of the need to protect soldiers from the vice and alcohol that surrounded the army training camps. Protecting soldiers from these temptations was vital to America’s war effort. In

Progressives and Prohibitionists, Gould discusses how prohibitionists exploited the war issue by making it the campaign keynote in the 1918 gubernatorial race between the former embattled Governor Ferguson and prohibitionist candidate William P. Hobby. Since Ferguson was impeached by the Texas House of Representatives in 1917 for misuse of state funds and shady financial relations with brewers, it was easy for prohibitionists to link one of Ferguson’s impeachment articles, an undisclosed loan of $156,500, to German breweries. Hence, prohibitionists successfully painted Ferguson as supporting the German war effort, which facilitated the election of Hobby and statewide prohibition. 2

Although statewide prohibition became law in Texas, Randolph B. Campbell points out in Gone to Texas that the backlash from its passage, together with prosperity from the “roaring twenties” facilitated the rise of moonshiners, bootleggers, and smuggling from Mexico. Hence, prohibition continued to be the underlying issue in state elections throughout the 1920s, and Democrats continued to feud. In 1924, however, the Ku Klux Klan came to the forefront because by that time the organization, according to Campbell, had grown to 170,000 members, which allowed it to gain control of Texas’s delegation to the 1924 Democratic national convention. The 1924 gubernatorial race was also highlighted by the candidacy of Governor Ferguson’s wife Miriam A. “Ma” Ferguson, who ran as the anti-Klan candidate. In Hood, Bonnet, and Little Brown Jug Norman D. Brown presents “Ma’s” candidacy as “Farmer Jim’s” attempt to vindicate the

Ferguson name after the former governor’s attempt to place his name on the ballot failed. Consequently, anti-Klan forces rallied to help “Ma” become the first woman governor of the state, thus ending the Klan’s reign, but marking the beginning of “two governors for the price of one.” In “Texas in the 1920s,” an article in the Handbook of Texas Online; however, Brown emphasizes that the November 4 election signified “the greatest political revolution that ever took place in Texas” as tens of thousands of Democrats cast a ballot for a Republican candidate for the first time. Klansmen, anti-Ferguson Democrats, and diehard prohibitionists concerned over the Ferguson’s anti-prohibitionist history deserted wholesale to Republican candidate George C. Butte, who garnered 294,970 votes, nearly three times as many votes as any previous Republican candidate for governor. ³

The gubernatorial race of 1924 signaled the decline of the Ku Klux Klan as a political force in Texas, but more importantly it required the Republicans to hold their first ever primary two years later because their candidate polled over 100,000 votes. It also revealed that prohibition was still as divisive an issue as before, leading to the 1928 national election, when, for the first time ever, a Republican presidential candidate carried Texas. Paul D. Casdorph’s A History of the Republican Party in Texas, 1865-1965 presents the Democrats’ nomination of New York Governor Al Smith in 1928 as an opportunity for Texas Republicans since Smith was anti-prohibition and a devout Catholic, both of which proved divisive in Texas. In Gone to Texas Mike Campbell adds that Smith also represented the Northeast wing of the Democratic Party, which was

dominated by urban-oriented labor and immigrant leaders, therefore, making him unacceptable to many Texans. Consequently, anti-Smith Democrats in Texas began to organize to help Herbert Hoover and the Republicans win Texas. In *Hood, Bonnet, and Little Brown Jug*, Brown refers to these ultra-dry Democrats as the “Anti-Al Smith Democrats of Texas” or “Hoovercrats,” whose task was to persuade fellow Democrats to vote for Hoover for president while supporting their Democratic local, county, and state tickets. Hence, prohibition once again became the decisive factor in an election for Texans as tens of thousands of Democrats voted Republican. As a result, prohibitionists and Protestants combined in 1928 to help a Republican presidential candidate win Texas for the first time ever by giving Hoover 367,242 votes to 340,080 for Smith. ⁴

By 1928, therefore, the divisiveness wrought by prohibition had not only given life to Texas’s Republicans, but more importantly, had precipitated a precedent for switching from the Democratic to Republican Party. Yet, as Brown points out in *Hood, Bonnet, and Little Brown Jug* the solution for several hundred thousand Democrats to an unacceptable candidate such as Smith was to stay home and not vote at all rather than vote Republican. Republicans, however, reached another milestone in the 1932 gubernatorial race when their candidate Orville Bullington polled the most votes of any candidate since Reconstruction. In *A History of the Republican Party in Texas*, Casdorph emphasizes that once “Ma” Ferguson announced her candidacy again, scores of anti-Ferguson and prohibition Democrats deserted their party once again to support the Republican ticket. Although “Ma” garnered 522,395 votes to win the election,

Republicans took heart in knowing their candidate polled over three hundred thousand votes in the governor’s race for the first time since Reconstruction.⁵

Although the divisiveness caused by prohibition within the Democratic ranks opened the door for some Republican gains, the impact of the stock market crash and ensuing depression returned the party to its dormant state. Because the roots of the Great Depression were embedded during Republican administrations, Texas Republicans lost the benefits of Republican hegemony and patronage after Franklin D. Roosevelt was inaugurated in 1933. The twenty-first amendment was also repealed that year, thus quieting the divisiveness of prohibition. Furthermore, in From Token to Triumph Roger M. Olien points out that Texas Republicans were under the control of South Texas political boss Renfro B. Creager, whose dual role as Republican state chairman and national committeeman enticed him to foster his own political ends rather than grow the state’s party. Hence, following Bullington’s success in the 1932 gubernatorial race, the party returned to its previous dormant state, only this time for sixteen years.⁶

Other factors and events during the decades leading up to World War II and continuing through President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s victories in 1952 and 1956 brought even deeper divisions within the Democratic Party of Texas. Because President Hoover and the Republicans failed to ameliorate the economic crisis, Democratic nominee Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected in 1932 in a landslide over Hoover, who, along with his party, received the blame for the depression. In “The Great Depression,” in

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⁵ Brown, Hood, Bonnet, and Little Brown Jug, 419; Casdorph, Republican Party in Texas, 142-43.

⁶ Roger M. Olien, From Token to Triumph: The Texas Republicans Since 1920 (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1982), 64.
the *Handbook of Texas Online*, Ben Proctor states that after the Democrats nominated Franklin D. Roosevelt of New York for president and John Nance Garner of Uvalde, Texas for vice president, Texans agreed that a “New Deal for the forgotten man” required their backing. Consequently, the Democratic ticket, according to Proctor, garnered 88.6 percent of the state vote in the 1932 election. Roosevelt’s New Deal, however, brought deeper divisions within the state’s Democratic Party. In *Texans, Politics, and the New Deal*, Lionel V. Patenaude points out that “most Texans were Democrats first and New Dealers second.” Because their ancestors had fought and shed blood for the preservation of states’ rights, Texas Democrats felt strongly about any federal encroachment upon the state’s right to control its own resources. The growth of big government and its regulations in the New Deal, a development that was regarded as anti-democratic, worried the state’s Democrats. Consequently, a schism arose within Texas’s Democratic Party between “modernists” and “traditionalists.”

In *The Big Rich: The Rise and Fall of the Greatest Texas Oil Fortunes*, Bryan Burrough defines the “modernists” as those ardent supporters of the New Deal and the “traditionalists” as those strongly opposed. Traditionalists, according to Burrough, were comprised of wealthy businessmen and those profiting heavily from the discovery of the East Texas Oil field who shared a “deep loathing” of taxes, labor organizers, and anyone who looked to change their ways. Traditionalists also saw new federal programs invading jurisdiction reserved for the city, county, and state. Burrough explains that because of the

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ensuing developments in the East Texas oil field and the efforts of East Texas lumber magnate John H. Kirby in rallying traditionalists, an ultraconservative movement was spawned that aimed at defeating Roosevelt’s reelection, and therefore dismantling the New Deal.  

In “East Texas Oil Field,” in the Handbook of Texas Online, Julia Cauble Smith addresses the rampant leasing, drilling, and overproduction that occurred after the Daisy Bradford No. 3 came in at sixty-eight hundred barrels a day in October 1930. Consequently, “hot oil” became the new commodity for East Texas independent operators. In The Big Rich, Bryan Burrough discusses the limited capabilities the Texas Railroad Commission had in curbing “hot oil” practices and the deflating impact that this had on the national market, which led the major companies to petition President Roosevelt for federal legislation to curb hot oil production. Independent operators saw this as a ploy by major oil companies to force them out of East Texas, and thus yet another split emerged within Texas’s Democrats between those who favored federal regulation and those who opposed it.  

Because of the pressure exerted upon Washington by major oil companies, Section 9 (e) of the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) was passed in 1933 authorizing federal authorities to prohibit the production and shipments of hot oil. In “East Texas Oil Field,” Handbook of Texas Online, Smith discusses the impact of this new federal legislation, declaring that it proved ineffective throughout the early months

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of 1934 as hot oil production increased. In *Oil in Texas: Gusher Age, 1895-1945* Roger M. Olien points out that it did not take long for purchasers and shippers of hot oil to realize that there were not enough federal agents to check on every one of their transactions. Olien also addresses the actions of Congress after the United States Supreme Court struck down the subsection of the NIRA in 1935 that outlawed hot oil. Consequently, Texas’s legislature passed a bill declaring hot oil to be contraband, thus allowing its confiscation and sale by the state. In *Texans, Politics, and the New Deal*, Lionel V. Patenaude emphasizes that the divisions caused by the hot oil wars essentially reflected the repercussions from the New Deal’s encroachment upon established Texas interests, particularly if that interest happened to be oil.  

Lone Star oilmen opposed to the federal government’s regulation of their oil became a large part of the membership of John H. Kirby’s Southern Committee to Uphold the Constitution (SCUC), which declared the New Deal was “un-American” and was committed to defeating Roosevelt’s reelection in 1936. In *The Big Rich* Burrough identifies the major oilmen aligned with Kirby as the leaders who would become the major financial players to fund an ultraconservative movement that would increase divisions within Texas’s Democratic ranks, and thus help to revitalize the Republican Party. Although the SCUC did not last long, from its remnants Kirby helped form another anti-Roosevelt organization, the Constitutional Democrats of Texas, which in August 1936 coalesced into a national organization, the Jeffersonian Democrats. According to

Patenaude’s “Jeffersonian Democrats,” in the *Handbook of Texas Online*, the Jeffersonians were the first organized and well financed effort that united anti-New Deal Democrats with anti-New Deal Republicans across the nation. Patenaude discusses the theme of the Texas Jeffersonians, its members, and their stated objective, “to take the Democratic Party back to the people.” More importantly, Patenaude believes that the Jeffersonians successfully laid the groundwork for future opposition to the New Deal. Although the Texas Jeffersonians failed to persuade enough Texas voters to support Republican candidate Alfred Landon in the 1936 election, Burrough also emphasizes that Kirby laid the foundation of an ultraconservative movement whose foundation consisted of “nouveau riche” oilmen.¹¹

In the 1936 election Roosevelt easily defeated Landon nationally as well as in Texas; however, the Jeffersonians continued to remain intact while attracting new oilmen such as Maco Stewart, Jr., Marrs McLean of Beaumont, and others who, according to Burrough, were eager for a political fight. That fight came in February 1937 when President Roosevelt unveiled his plans for changing the ideological balance of the United State Supreme Court in order to prevent more of his New Deal Programs from being struck down. In *Gone to Texas: A History of the Lone Star State*, Campbell discusses why the Supreme Court’s decision to strike down certain programs of Roosevelt’s First New Deal resulted in the president’s “court-packing” bill in 1937. Although the president interpreted his victory in 1936 as a mandate by the American people to continue with New Deal programs, it was not a mandate for him to pack the court with liberal justices,

which was viewed as unconstitutional and dictatorial by most Americans. In *Texans, Politics, and the New Deal*, Patenaude not only speaks of the opposition from the millions of Americans who helped reelect Roosevelt, but also emphasizes the opposition from Texans in Washington that was most important in defeating the bill. More importantly, however, Patenaude points out that because of the “court packing” bill the philosophical differences between old-school conservatism and supporters of the New Deal within Texas’s Democratic Party became more pronounced, thus becoming a rallying point for the beginning of overt opposition to Roosevelt and the New Deal.\(^\text{12}\)

In *The Establishment in Texas Politics*, George Norris Green establishes 1938 as the year oil-backed ultraconservatives took control of the state’s political structure as two outspoken pro-Roosevelt congressmen were defeated and oil-and-business-backed W. Lee “Pappy” O’Daniel won the governorship. In *The Big Rich* Burrough emphasizes that O’Daniel’s victory marked the beginning of two decades of ultraconservative rule, and while as governor O’Daniel became Texas oil’s reliable partner. Burrough also points out that O’Daniel’s administration was dominated by ultraconservatives, many of them oilmen, including his chief financial backer, Maco Stewart. Hence, following the court fight and the 1938 elections, polarization of Texas’s Democratic Party into New Deal and conservative groups became more defined, while opposition to the New Deal among leading ultraconservatives grew to a new level. In *Gone to Texas*, however, Campbell reminds his readers that it was Roosevelt’s decision to seek an unprecedented third term that brought many important Texans who already disliked the New Deal into open

opposition against Roosevelt and the Democratic Party. Roosevelt’s decision essentially ended Texas Vice President Garner’s chances of becoming the first Texas-born nominee for the presidency, which also did not set well with most Texans.\textsuperscript{13}

Although Roosevelt won in 1940, the turmoil created from his “court packing” plan and his running for a third term was, according to Green in his \textit{Establishment in Texas Politics}, the “harbinger of internecine warfare” that continued to polarize Texas’s Democratic Party for years to come. Once Roosevelt decided to seek a third term, Garner Democrats joined many of the old Jeffersonians in the battle against the New Deal Democrats. In \textit{The Big Rich} Burrough marks 1944 as the year when these two anti-Roosevelt coalitions formed the ‘Texas Regulars,’ who, outraged by Roosevelt’s wartime price controls, mounted the most serious challenge to the president to date. After the Jeffersonians succeeded in capturing the first state Democratic convention in May 1944, they were hopeful that they could seize control of the Texas Democratic Party, but they were defeated at the second state convention in September. The Regulars platform called for an end to the New Deal and labor unions, and it demanded restoration of states’ rights and white supremacy. In \textit{The Big Rich} Burrough describes the Regulars membership as being dominated by oilmen, including lobbyists from all the major oil companies active in Texas, as well as many well-known independents who staged an elaborately financed anti-Roosevelt campaign. Still, as Campbell points out in \textit{Gone to Texas}, the Regulars could not destroy Roosevelt’s popularity among rank and file Texans in the November

\textsuperscript{13} George Norris Green, \textit{The Establishment in Texas Politics: The Primitive Years, 1938-1957} (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979); Burrough, \textit{Big Rich}, 134; Campbell, \textit{Gone to Texas}, 394.
election. The Regulars polled only 12 percent of the state’s vote while Roosevelt garnered an overwhelming 72 percent.\textsuperscript{14}

In \textit{Gone to Texas}, Campbell assesses Roosevelt’s victory in 1944 as reflecting a persistent loyalty to the state Democratic Party while the growing divisions between liberals and conservatives revealed that most Texans were still receptive to a conservative brand of politics. Yet, according to Campbell, the next decades precipitated increasing liberalism within the national as well as the state party, which led to further divisions within the Texas Democrats. In \textit{From Token to Triumph}, Roger M. Olien attributes the recurring divisions within the Democrats as the key to providing an opportunity for Texas’s Republican Party to reemerge once again. This, according to Olien, occurred in the 1948 Democratic senatorial primary when former governor Coke Stevenson faced off against Congressman Lyndon Baynes Johnson. In \textit{Gone to Texas}, Randolph B. Campbell discusses the shenanigans used by the Johnson campaign that made the Senate primary race between the conservative candidate Stevenson and the moderate Johnson so divisive for the Democratic Party, thus providing the Republicans with a glimmer of hope in the general election. Although the growth of Texas’s Republican Party was still being hindered by their selfish leader Renfro B. Creager, Olien remarks in \textit{From Token to Triumph} that Creager realized a victory in the senate race would advance his personal ambitions. Hence, Creager endorsed the conservative Republican candidate H.J. “Jack” Porter against the moderate Democrat Lyndon Baynes Johnson, who, according to

\textsuperscript{14} Green, \textit{Establishment in Texas Politics}, 30; Burrough, \textit{Big Rich}, 138; Campbell, \textit{Gone to Texas}, 406-7.
Campbell easily defeated Porter in the general election, but not without having resorted to chicanery to win the Democratic primary.  

When outcries of election fraud were heard following Johnson’s 1948 Democratic primary runoff victory over Stevenson, Republicans, according to Olien, saw an opportunity to lure those disgruntled conservatives who supported Stevenson into the Republican camp for the general election. In *From Token to Triumph* Olien also focuses upon Johnson’s Republican opponent Porter and his relationship with Houston oil millionaire Roy Cullen, both of whom were bent upon expanding Texas’s Republican Party and moving it in an ultraconservative direction. Although Porter was defeated by Johnson in the general election, Burrough argues in *The Big Rich* that Porter’s senatorial bid made him the best-known and most active Texas Republican who began a far-reaching effort to rebuild Texas’s Republican Party, thus laying the groundwork for an ultraconservative takeover of Texas’s Republican Party.  

Divisions within Texas’s Democratic Party in post-war Texas were also facilitated by the Second Red Scare. In *Gone to Texas* Campbell lays the groundwork by linking Soviet expansion in Eastern Europe, the Soviets’ detonation of an atomic bomb in 1949 and the communist takeover of China the same year to America’s growing concerns about communist infiltration and the loyalty of its citizens. In 1950, when Senator Joseph McCarthy leveled accusations against the State Department for harboring communists, Campbell emphasizes that this was the time when many Texans were ready to listen.

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15 Campbell, *Gone to Texas*, 410, 413-14; Olien, *From Token to Triumph*, 103-4.
Consequently, the liberal-conservative split within the Democratic Party widened because liberals, according to Campbell, were the most likely to be labeled as communist sympathizers. The 1944 firing of University of Texas President Homer P. Rainey, however, over charges that communism was being taught at the university had brought the issue of communism close to home even earlier for many Texans. In *Cowboy Conservatism: Texas and the Rise of the Modern Right*, Sean P. Cunningham connects Rainey’s firing to his candidacy for governor in 1946; he wanted to avenge himself. By championing academic freedom, labor union rights, and civil rights Rainey gained much liberal support; however, Campbell points out in *Gone to Texas* that his conservative opponents portrayed him as a friend of radical labor and an adherent of radical left-wing ideology. In the campaign, Rainey was easily defeated in the Democratic runoff by Beauford Jester, who became governor, but another conflict had emerged within the party.\(^\text{17}\)

The liberal-conservative split was also impacted by the communist-infiltrated labor unions located across the state. In *Gone to Texas* Campbell addresses the negative economic impact of the numerous strikes in the Congress of Industrial Organization (CIO) plants during 1946-1947, which resulted in Governor Jester and the Texas legislature passing a right to work law that prohibited requiring union membership as a condition of employment. Conservatives in the legislature capitalized upon the issue by portraying those liberals who voted against the law as communists within Texas’s own legislature. President Harry S. Truman’s stance on labor and race, however, drew the

\(^{17}\) Campbell, *Gone to Texas*, 411-12; Sean P. Cunningham, *Cowboy Conservatism: Texas and the Rise of the Modern Right* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 28.
greatest ire of conservative Texans. Truman not only vetoed the anti-union Taft-Hartley Act of 1947, but he also sent to Congress a new recommendation for a ten-point program on civil rights. In *The Establishment in Texas Politics*, George Norris Green discusses Truman’s motive for the program and the backlash that it caused with Jester and other southern governors, who castigated Truman’s proposed anti-poll tax and anti-lynching laws as violations of states’ rights, and considered his proposal for a permanent Fair Employment Practice Commission FEPC a violation of “racial purity laws.”

The issue of Texas’s tidelands, however, cemented the liberal-conservative split within Texas’s Democratic Party and provided the issue that Texas’s ultraconservative oilmen needed to initiate another third party movement. In *Yellow Dogs and Republicans: Allan Shivers and Texas Two-Party Politics* Ricky F. Dobbs says Texas asserted ownership of its tidelands during the Republic period, and this was confirmed by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, which ended the Mexican War. The controversy over the tidelands, according to Dobbs, began in 1947 when six Supreme Court justices ruled against California’s claim to its own tidelands, which Texas officials feared could happen to them. Since many Texas oilmen desired to exploit the oil-rich land off the Texas and Louisiana coast, it was they who stood to lose the most. Hence, Green points out in *Establishment in Texas Politics* that it was the Texas oilmen who dominated the old Texas Regular faction who took up the states’ right battle-cry and began to talk of a third party if Truman received the Democratic presidential nomination because of his opposition to state ownership of the tidelands. Truman’s nomination,

however, according to Green, stymied the Regulars’ momentum because Governor Jester opposed a third party movement. Therefore, most Texas Democrats abandoned the Regulars and joined Jester’s Loyalists at the second state convention by replacing Regular electors with Loyalist electors for the national convention, although the Regulars had won a majority at the May convention. Consequently, anti-Truman Democrats marched out of the September convention under the banner of “Dixiecrats” and joined four Deep South states in their support of South Carolina Governor Strom Thurmond for the presidency.19

In *Gone to Texas* Campbell discusses the forming of the national “Dixiecrat” party, which gave Thurmond an overwhelming majority of votes in four Deep South states. Mike Kingston, Sam Attlesey, and Mary G. Crawford show, however, in *Texas Almanac’s Political History of Texas* that Thurmond received only 6.7 percent of Texas’s vote, or a little more than 100,000 votes. Hence, the “Dixiecrat” movement did not have a significant impact upon the 1948 presidential election, in which Texans contributed 750,700 votes to Truman in his upset win over Republican candidate Thomas Dewey. Campbell, however, reminds his readers in *Gone to Texas* that Truman’s victory in Texas owed more to tradition and a lack of viable opponents than to support for his policies. Thus, the Truman administration’s decision to sue Texas on December 21 for federal ownership of its tidelands and the ensuing controversy that developed only exacerbated the existing split within Texas’s Democratic Party, thus opening the door for any viable

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future Republican candidates. Moreover, according to V.O. Key, author of *Southern Politics*, after the 1948 election the state developed the bitterest intra-Democratic fight along New Deal and anti-New Deal lines in the South, but with only one viable party, there was no other place to go. 20

Following the death of Governor Jester in July of 1949, however, one-party dominance in Texas received another serious challenge, and this time it would be with such momentum that a Republican presidential candidate would win Texas in two consecutive elections. In *Yellow Dogs and Republicans* Dobbs links Lieutenant Governor Allan Shivers’ ascendancy to the governorship following the death of Governor Jester to the 1950 decision by the Supreme Court in which it ruled in favor of the federal government’s ownership of the tidelands. Consequently, Shivers’ own qualms toward the Truman administration and national party easily coalesced with the public backlash in Texas from the tidelands issue. More importantly, Green points out in *Establishment in Texas Politics* that Governor Shivers joined Texas’s newly rich oilmen, whose wealth essentially controlled the state, in calling for a “return” of the tidelands. Thus, the return of Texas’s tidelands provided Shivers with an issue of such magnitude that it could be exploited in the 1952 election, but in a manner in which only Governor Shivers could have imagined. Hence, when President Truman came out in support of civil rights and vetoed a bill in 1952 that would have guaranteed Texas ownership of its tidelands, the stage was set, according to Campbell’s *Gone to Texas*, for another Republican triumph in

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Texas. Governor Shivers would lead a revolt against the national Democratic Party, which now resembled a much different entity than the one he headed in Texas. 21

Before Shivers could stage a revolt, however, he had to win the governorship in his own right. Although Shivers easily won the 1950 gubernatorial election, the 1952 race provided him a much stauncher opponent in liberal challenger Ralph Yarbrough. In Gone to Texas, Campbell discusses the gubernatorial as well as the senatorial race, in which conservative candidate Price Daniel was pitted against liberal Lindley G. Beckworth. Still, Campbell points out that it was largely because of the “Tidelands steal” that both Shivers and Daniel were victorious. By the November election, however, a much different political scenario had developed in Texas, one from which the Republican Party stood to gain. First, Olien points out in From Token to Triumph that Democratic Congressman Eugene Worley of Shamrock resigned his seat in February 1950 to accept a federal judicial position. Consequently, Jack Porter, who had made significant strides to build Texas’s Republican Party after being defeated by Johnson in the 1948 senate race, became the chief financial supporter of Republican candidate Ben Guill of Pampa, who went on to win the May 6 special election, thus becoming the first Republican to sit in Congress for Texas since 1931. More importantly, however, Olien addresses the death of Republican National Committeeman Creager on October 28, 1950, thus removing the grip that had stymied the growth of the state party for nearly thirty years. 22

21 Dobbs, Yellow Dogs and Republicans, 62; Green, Establishment in Texas Politics, 142; Campbell, Gone to Texas, 416.
22 Campbell, Gone to Texas, 415-16; Olien, From Token to Triumph, 109-10.
Ironically, Porter and the fortunes of Texas’s Republican Party became even more promising once Porter learned that his own goals for the upcoming presidential election coalesced with those of Governor Shivers, both of whom wanted to see Republican candidate Dwight D. Eisenhower elected president of the United States. Porter’s goal, therefore, was to be selected Republican National Committeeman from Texas when the Republican national convention met in July. In *From Token to Triumph* Olien places Porter’s contest with Henry Zweifel for Republican national committeeman within a much larger context since it mirrored the Robert A. Taft and Dwight D. Eisenhower matchup for the Republican presidential nomination. Because Texas’s Republican organization was firmly in the hands of the pro-Taft old guard, Eisenhower’s candidacy, according to Olien, was what Porter needed in order to carry him into power. Hence, Porter became the leader of the Eisenhower movement among Texas Republicans by assuming the leading role in Eisenhower’s shadow campaign. Moreover, Burrough points out in *The Big Rich* that once Eisenhower declared his candidacy, prominent Texas oilmen such as Hugh Roy Cullen, Sid W. Richardson, Marrs McClean, and others joined Porter in a grass roots campaign for control of the Republican Party because they “smelled a winner” in Eisenhower. More importantly, however, Burrough points out that it was Cullen’s influence upon Shivers that led Texas Democrats into the Eisenhower camp.23

In April of 1952 Shivers and his entourage of anti-Truman Democrats blasted the Truman administration while addressing the State Democratic Executive Committee

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SDEC in New Braunfels. In Ricky F. Dobbs’ *Yellow Dogs and Democrats* Shivers excoriated the Truman administration for its position on the tidelands and civil rights, and for administering socialistic policies. Moreover, Green points out in *Establishment in Texas Politics* that Shivers and his former Dixiecrat allies won control of the state Democratic convention in May and appointed an uninstructed delegation to the national convention in July. Consequently, divisiveness within the Democratic Party grew as those loyal to Truman bolted the convention; however, Dobbs emphasizes in *Yellow Dogs and Democrats* that because many former Fair and New Dealers remained seated, it revealed that many pro-Truman Democrats were now aligned with Shivers and the conservatives. Thus, the term “Shivercrats” became the new label given to the new Democratic coalition of Fair and New Dealers now in step with Shivers and the conservative wing of Texas’s Democratic Party.”

In *Establishment in Texas Politics*, Green makes it clear that Governor Shivers’ opposition toward the national party was cemented once the Democratic national convention nominated liberal Illinois governor Adlai Stevenson for the presidency in July. Stevenson’s opposition to state ownership of tidelands, according to Green, made it impossible for Shivers to support him. More important, however, was Shivers’ orchestration of the unthinkable at the second state Democratic convention that fall. In *Gone to Texas*, Randolph B. Campbell points out that for the first time in Texas history, the state Democratic Party officially endorsed a Republican candidate for the presidency. Meanwhile, Porter and Texas pro-Eisenhower Republicans’ fortunes began to change at

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the end of June when Taft forces resorted to political debauchery to gain control of the Republican state convention in Mineral Wells. In *From Token to Triumph*, Olien addresses the “steam-roller” performance used by the Republican State Executive Committee in awarding twenty-six of Texas’s thirty-one contested delegates to the national convention to Taft, which came to be widely known in the state and national press as the “Texas Steal.” Thus, because of the clear chicanery used by Taft forces, Olien points out that the press became an ally for Porter and his cadre of Texas oilmen who were committed to an ultraconservative takeover of the Texas Republican Party.25

By the time the Republicans gathered in July for their national convention at Chicago’s Cow Palace, the backlash from the “Texas Steal” had become damaging for the Taft Republicans. According to Olien, it had come to dominate such headlines as the *Dallas Morning News* and the *New York Times*. Moreover, *Time* and *Newsweek* ran scathing articles against the delegate “rustlers” at Mineral Wells. Hence, by the third day of the convention, Olien points out that even Taft’s managers realized they were on the wrong side of a moral issue. Consequently, the sun shone bright for Texas Republicans, which was pointed out in O. Douglas Weeks’ *Texas Presidential Politics in 1952*. Weeks makes clear that when the contested delegates from Texas were finally seated in Eisenhower’s behalf, it not only helped secure Eisenhower the presidential nomination,

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but also assured that Jack Porter became the new Republican national committeeman from Texas.26

Once morality prevailed in Chicago, thus securing Eisenhower the presidential nomination, and Governor Shivers secured Eisenhower’s name as the Democratic presidential candidate in Texas, the stage was set to deliver the state to Eisenhower in the upcoming election. Shivers saw to it that Stevenson and vice-presidential nominee John Sparkman remained atop the state ballot for the Democrats; however, Weeks clarifies in *Texas Presidential Politics in 1952* that Shivers’ strategy for his supporters was to encourage them to cross over and vote the Republican ticket for president and vice-president while supporting the Democratic slate of candidates for state offices. Moreover, Campbell points out in *Gone to Texas* that every Democrat except one running for state office allowed his name to be cross-filed as a Republican. Texas oilmen were also instrumental in facilitating the coalition of “Shivercrats” and Eisenhower Republicans by ensuring that the tidelands issue dominated the 1952 election. For instance, in *The Big Rich*, Burrough discusses the Texas oilmen who hired the public relations firm, Watson Associates, which created hundreds of thousands of copies of an anti-Stevenson newspaper entitled the *Native Texan*, one edition of which portray the school children of Texas as the true victims of federal control since royalties from state lands were used to

support the public schools. The newspaper also played upon other issues such as civil rights and the National Democratic Party’s relationship with the Kremlin.27

The Eisenhower campaign gained even more momentum during the fall as the “Shivercrats” and Eisenhower Republicans coalesced into what Dobbs describes in Yellow Dogs and Republicans as a blending of Republican economic conservatism and southern racial and states’ rights worries. Dobbs also points out that the “Shivercrat” defection left the remnants of Texas’s Democratic Party in alarming disarray. Moreover, Weeks discusses in Texas Presidential Politics in 1952 that “Texas Democrats for Eisenhower” formed in September to carry the state for Eisenhower. Although it was impossible to determine precisely how many Democrats became “Shivercrats” because there was no statutory requirement for party registration in Texas, Dobbs acknowledges in Yellow Dogs and Democrats that an overwhelming 73 percent who “liked Ike” claimed to be Democrats. Thus, on November 4, Eisenhower tallied 1,102,879 votes in Texas to Stevenson’s 969,228. Shortly thereafter, Eisenhower signed a bill guaranteeing Texas ownership of its tidelands, which guaranteed significant revenue for the state and even more benefits for oil companies.28

Eisenhower’s victory marked the first time a Republican presidential candidate won Texas and the nation since 1928, yet once again, not without the help of the Democrats. But unlike Hoover, Eisenhower would win Texas and a second term four years later because of a new political scenario. Although prohibition had been the chief

27 Weeks, Texas Presidential Politics in 1952, 87; Campbell, Gone to Texas, 416; Burrough, Big Rich, 219-20.

28 Dobbs, Yellow Dogs and Republicans, 91-4; Weeks, Texas Presidential Politics in 1952, 89; Kingston, Attesley, and Crawford, Texas Almanac’s Political History of Texas, 94.
ingredient for Republican growth until 1932, Dobbs’ *Yellow Dogs and Democrats* explains Eisenhower’s victory twenty years later as the culmination of an effort by Texas Democracy’s most conservative elements to reverse liberal reform measures of the Roosevelt and Truman administrations. Big government, federal regulation of state agencies, civil rights, labor unions and communism were all issues that undermined the traditional values and beliefs of conservative Texans. Thus, President Truman’s decision to sue Texas for ownership of its tidelands in December 1948 proved to be the final straw for tens of thousands of Texas Democrats who knew that it was time to become “presidential Republicans.” 29

Another part of that new political dynamic facilitating Eisenhower’s victory was the state’s urban growth. In “The Republican Party,” in the *Handbook of Texas Online*, Carl H. Moneyhon links Eisenhower’s wins to the state’s tremendous urban growth following World War II. By 1950, because of wartime industry, training camps, and a postwar economic boom, Texas’s urban population had expanded to 59.8 percent of the state’s population, and to approximately 69 percent by 1960. Much of this increase in urban population was linked to Texas’s growing industries, particularly oil; therefore, these new urbanites were more akin to states’ rights rather than federal regulation of industry, which made them align more closely with the Republican Party. In *Southern Republicanism*, Louis M. Seagull points out that people moving into the cities were not only rural Texans, but approximately half were those from the Midwest and Northeast regions of the country who were looking for new opportunities. More importantly for

Texas’s Republican Party, those from the Midwest and Northeast adhered to a conservative philosophy of government and did not share the same affinity to the Democracy that Texas Democrats did; therefore, voting Republican was not seen as an act of betrayal for them. In *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, renowned political historian and West Texas Native V.O. Key best summed up the political impact of urbanization on Eisenhower’s victories when he argued that by 1950 the growth of the cities contained “the seeds of political change for the South. In almost every type of analysis urban political behavior differs significantly from that of the rural areas.”

The tidelands issue not only provoked tens of thousands of Democratic states’ rights adherents to vote Republican, but it also confirmed that Texas oil, the linchpin of urbanization, was the driving economic force behind the resurgence of the Republican Party in Texas. Although Roy Cullen proved to be the first chief benefactor for Texas Republicans by helping bankroll the efforts of Jack Porter, other ultraconservative chieftains such as H.L. Hunt, Sid Richardson, and Clint Murchison joined Cullen in becoming major contributors to the Republican Party. In *The Establishment in Texas Politics*, Green points out that because of the magnitude of the tidelands issue and the prospects of an Eisenhower victory in 1951, Texas oilmen were “no longer afraid of switching from Democrats to Republicans.” Thus, as the national Democratic Party was reshaped by the liberal policies of the Roosevelt and Truman administrations, many of Texas’s conservative Democrats, seeing the impact this was having upon their own party,

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began voting Republican. Together with the rise of Texas oil and urbanization, it was the perfect formula for the beginning of Republican ascendancy in Texas.\textsuperscript{31}

The election returns for 1956 gave Eisenhower a more sweeping victory in Texas than he won in 1952; however, the coattails from Eisenhower’s 1952 victory produced only one major victory in 1954 for the Republicans when Dallas real estate salesman Bruce Alger became the first full term congressman to represent Texas since Harry Wurzbach’s final campaign in 1930. By May 1961, however, political shockwaves reverberated through the state when John G. Tower became the first Republican from Texas to be elected to the United States Senate since Reconstruction. The magnitude of Tower’s election is also measured by the statistic that in the same year there were no Republicans serving in Texas’s 180 member legislature. Furthermore, Tower’s election represented the first Republican Senator elected from a former Confederate state since Newell Sanders of Tennessee left office in 1913. Still, by 1978, Texas Republicans had achieved what most political pundits in the state thought unthinkable when they elected the first governor since the Reconstruction era. William B. Clements became the first Republican to be elected to a statewide office since Reconstruction. Moreover, Republicans won five seats to the House of Representatives, thus bringing the total to twenty-three Republicans in the House and four in the Senate by the date of Clements’s inauguration. Republicans also won eight county judgeships along with a number being elected to state courts.\textsuperscript{32}

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The surprise and magnitude of Clements’s victory convinced many Texans that their dream of Texas becoming a two-party state had finally been realized. In *Two-Party Texas; The John Tower Era, 1961-1984*, however, John R. Knaggs clearly points out that there were not enough Republicans serving in the state legislature or other statewide, county, and local offices for Texas to claim two-party status. Hence, according to Campbell in *Gone to Texas*, two-party status for Texas did not arrive until the 1988 election after William P. Clements had been elected to his second term as governor and presidential candidate George Bush, Sr. of Texas and running mate Dan Quayle carried Texas with 56 percent of the vote, thus completing the state’s third consecutive Republican sweep by landslide margins in presidential races. Campbell also justifies his position by emphasizing that Republicans won their first “down-ticket” statewide races, electing three members of the Texas Supreme Court and a member of the Railroad Commission. Moreover, with the convening of the Seventy-First Legislature in 1989, there were fifty-seven House and eight Senate Republicans. 33

Whereas prohibition, the liberal policies of the Roosevelt and Truman administrations, the rise of Texas oil and urbanization were the underlying reasons contributing to the revitalization of Texas’s Republican Party from the early 1900s thru 1956, what would become the chief factors causing Texas to become a two-party state by 1988? While Eisenhower’s victories in 1952 and 1956 left Texas’s Democratic Party...

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even more divided between a conservative-right and liberal-left, by 1957 Kenneth Bridges points out in *Twilight of the Texas Democrats: The 1978 Governor’s Race* that the liberal wing of Texas’s Democratic Party began to hope that the more reform-minded direction of the national Democratic Party, particularly with its emphasis on social policy and civil rights, would so alienate the conservatives that they would leave the Democracy for the Republican Party. In effect, according to Bridges, this would leave a state Democratic Party controlled by moderates and liberals who would more likely support the national party. Thus, liberal Democratic hopes were encouraged when their candidate Ralph Yarborough was elected to the United States Senate in a 1957 special election. Knaggs explains in *Two-Party Texas* that Texas’s election law at the time allowed Yarborough to win the special election without a runoff, which had usually undermined liberal chances as the conservatives converged upon one candidate to defeat the liberal in the runoff. Yet the Republican and Democratic conservative candidates divided the conservative vote, allowing Yarborough to win without a majority of the vote. Unfortunately for liberal Democrats, however, the strength of the party’s conservatives was far beyond what they had hoped. In other words, conservative Democrats had begun to leave the party for the Republicans, but at the expense of the Democratic party’s monopoly on electoral power.  

While Yarborough’s victory in the special election to the United States Senate worked to the advantage of Texas Republicans, events within the oil industry did not. In *The Big Rich*, Burrough addresses the negative impact of President Eisenhower’s veto of

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the Harris-Fulbright Natural Gas Bill of 1956, which would have increased natural gas prices between two hundred million and four hundred million dollars a year, an increase that would have boosted the value of southwestern gas reserves between twelve billion and thirty billion dollars. Eisenhower’s veto not only cost the Republican Party millions in oil-industry donations, it was also the worst reversal Texas Oil had sustained. Moreover, Burrough points out that by 1958 the competition from Middle Eastern oil was slowly strangling the industry. Although European demand, long a foundation of Texas oil sales, peaked during the Suez Crisis of 1956, it fell sharply thereafter, causing the Texas Railroad Commission to limit Texas’s production. Furthermore, by 1960, according to Burrough, the golden age of Texas oil had come to an end. By that time costs to drill a well had risen so high that an independent operator in Texas could barely afford to sink a wildcat well. Burrough also points out that by that time the titans of the Texas’s golden age had begun passing away.35

Although conservative oilmen such as Amon Carter, Jim West, Sid Richardson, and Roy Cullen had all passed away by 1960, and Clint Murchison’s health was quickly failing, H.L. Hunt was still living and determined to remain a voice for the Republican Party. Hence, according to Burrough’s Big Rich Hunt decided in 1958 to resurrect his old radio and television program ‘Facts Forum’, but under the new name ‘Life Line’. ‘Facts Forum’ began as a radio show in 1951 to educate Americans on the dangers of communism and liberalism. Because of Hunt’s later religious conversion, however, his new right-wing propaganda program would carry a religious tone. Burrough points out

35 Burrough, Big Rich, 246-48; 268-72.
that as ‘Life Line’ launched visceral attacks on Socialists, Democrats, liberals, the United Nations, Wall Street, and anyone who criticized the oil industry, it resonated with many Americans in the late 1950s, especially in the rural South, where dozens of small radio stations were happy to accept its cut-rate commentary. By the early 1960s its broadcasts could be heard on 354 stations in forty-seven states. According to Burrough the rise of ‘Life Line’ also persuaded Hunt to begin firing off letters to newspapers and giving speeches to small right-wing religious groups. Little did they realize at the time, but Hunt’s followers were forming a following known today as the religious right, who would play a vital role in Texas’s transformation from a predominantly Democratic to a two-party state by 1988.  

Meanwhile, the ill will generated by Johnson’s victory over Governor Stevenson in the 1948 Democratic primary was revived in 1959 after Democrat hopeful John F. Kennedy launched his presidential bid. Johnson, who had become Texas’s powerful Senate majority leader, would eventually challenge Kennedy for the Democratic nomination, but he would also be up for reelection to the Senate in 1960, and did not want to risk giving up the Senate seat should his presidential plans not materialize. In Two-Party Texas, Knaggs points out that Johnson, never one to miss out on using his political power, pressured the Texas legislature to pass what came to be known as the Johnson Act, which permitted him to run for reelection to the Senate and seek the Presidency simultaneously. Thus, Johnson sought both offices, but ultimately settled for the vice-presidency. Knaggs writes that although his loyal supporters went along with his

\footnote{Burrough, Big Rich, 268-72; 276-78.}
“shrewd manipulation,” thousands of Texans, who otherwise would have voted for him, protested by voting for the Republican Senate nominee John Tower. Moreover, Roger M. Olien points out in From Token to Triumph that in November 1960 Johnson’s campaign ran a fraudulent full-page advertisement in the Dallas Times Herald which listed over three thousand local residents as Johnson supporters. Thus, in the opinion of indignant Republicans and some conservative Democrats, who might become Republicans, Johnson was up to his dirty old tricks again.37

Knaggs also points out in Two-Party Texas that the nomination of Kennedy for president in 1960 posed another problem for conservative Democrats in Texas. First, their general distrust of power concentrated in Washington was intensified by a perceived new tilt toward socialism with Kennedy’s ‘New Frontier’. O. Douglas Weeks also points out in Texas in the 1960 Presidential Election that Johnson’s decision to become Kennedy’s running mate further complicated matters since Johnson, who held the moderate center of Texas Democrats together, wholeheartedly embraced a platform heavily weighted against Southern conservative views on civil rights and labor legislation. Moreover, Kennedy’s nomination marked only the second time for a Catholic to receive the presidential nomination of a major party since Al Smith in 1928. Brian R. Calfano, Elizabeth Anne Oldmixon, and Peter Von Doepp address, in an article entitled “Religious Advocacy in the Texas Legislature,” the problem that Kennedy’s nomination posed to a state dominated by Protestant religious traditionalism at the time. Hence, even with Johnson as

37 Knaggs, Two-Party Texas, 4; Olien, From Token to Triumph, 172.
his running mate, Kennedy barely defeated Richard M. Nixon not only in Texas, but across the nation as well. 38

Once Johnson resigned his Senate seat to become Kennedy’s running mate, therefore guaranteeing a special election in 1961, Texas Republicans remained optimistic. Knaggs points out in Two-Party Texas that Republican candidate John Tower received 41 percent of the votes in the 1960 Senate race, many of which were cast by conservative Democrats protesting against Johnson running for reelection to the Senate and seeking the presidency simultaneously. Knaggs also closely examines the challenges that Democratic candidate William “Bill” Blakley’s conservatism posed to the liberal Democrats as well as Kennedy’s foreign policy blunder in Cuba, both of which were conducive to a Tower victory. Hence, because Tower won by a razor thin margin, Knaggs concludes that the liberal element of Texas’s Democratic Party was pivotal in electing the first Republican United States senator to represent Texas during the twentieth century, or what Knaggs also considers to be the “Big Breakthrough” for Texas Republicans. Consequently, according to O. Douglas Weeks in Texas in 1964: A One-Party State Again? Texas Republicans sought to make a superhuman effort in the off-year regular election of 1962 to win more elective places and speed up the process of producing a two-party system. For instance, they nominated a record number of candidates for state-wide elected offices, Congressional seats, state Senate seats, state House seats, and local offices. As encouraging for Republicans, however, were the results

of the gubernatorial race, in which Republican candidate Jack Cox, who had run as a conservative Democrat in 1960, tallied 46 percent of the vote against John Connally, the best showing to date for a Republican gubernatorial candidate since Orville Bullington’s 38 percent against “Ma” Ferguson in 1932. 39

In Texas in 1964: A One-Party State Again? Weeks points out that the Republicanism that had been developing in Texas since 1952 was essentially the Eisenhower-Nixon brand – moderate and largely liberal conservative, while Olien distinguishes it in From Token to Triumph as “Modern Republicanism.” Between 1962 and 1964, however, the growth of Republicanism in the South and in Texas, according to Weeks, fell more into the hands of reactionaries and ultraconservatives. The increasing prominence of the civil rights issue and the undoubtedly more aggressive liberalism of the Kennedy Administration on this and other issues had caused more Southerners to despair of relying any more on the Democrats and to transfer their allegiance to the Republican Party. Consequently, infiltrations of these people pushed the Republican organizations further to the right while Senator Barry Goldwater emerged in late 1963 and early 1964 as the answer to their prayers. Goldwater’s rise to political prominence began in 1960 with the publication of his Conscience of a Conservative, in which he captivated Southerners by his positions on the economy, and especially civil rights. Moreover, in Two-Party Texas, Knaggs refers to a statewide poll that was released by The Houston Chronicle on November 22, 1963 that showed if the election were held then

between Goldwater and Kennedy, Goldwater would carry Texas by about 50,000 votes.

In *From Token to Triumph*, Olien points out that by the time Goldwater officially declared his candidacy, the course of national politics and therefore Texas had been altered radically by the assassination of Kennedy on November 22, 1963. With his death, Texas Republicans were suddenly faced with opposing a native son, incumbent in the White House. Knaggs confirms Olien’s view in *Two-Party Texas* by telling how the tragic turn of events took effect in less than a month after the assassination when a Democratic candidate in a special congressional election defeated the Republican candidate by more than a two to one margin in a race that had initially given the Republicans hope. Moreover, Weeks’ *Texas in 1964: A One-Party State Again* points out that accompanying Kennedy in his final ride were the three Democratic leaders who represented the principal divisions of the party in the state – Vice President Johnson, middle of the road; Governor John B. Connally, right and right center; Senator Ralph Yarborough, left and left center. Hence, Kennedy’s death accomplished his purpose in Texas perhaps better than he could have done had he lived by uniting these three groups in what was the greatest tragedy in the national history of the Democratic Party.41

In *Gone to Texas*, Campbell points out that Republican fortunes suffered in 1964 not only from Kennedy’s assassination, but also from right-wing extremism that seemingly had taken over Texas politics, particularly in Dallas, where, in addition to H.L.

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Hunt’s ‘Life Line’, a steady barrage of right-wing propaganda had stirred crowds to threaten Lyndon and Lady Bird Johnson in 1960 and hit and spit upon United Nations ambassador Adlai Stevenson in 1963. Knaggs points out in *Two-Party Texas* that the growing conflict in Vietnam also worked against the Republicans. Whereas Goldwater was portrayed as a warmonger who would use nuclear weapons carelessly, Johnson campaigned as a big dove, the man of peace. Thus, it came as no surprise in 1964 when Johnson defeated Goldwater in Texas by twenty-six percentage points, thus solidifying the name “Landslide Lyndon.” Moreover, Weeks points out in *Texas in 1964: A Two-Party State Again?* that the Republicans also had dismal showings in congressional and legislative races as well as statewide offices, which included the defeats of Congressmen Bruce Alger of Dallas and Ed Foreman of Odessa. Their only bright spot was a United States Senate race in which George Bush Sr. polled 44 percent of the vote in his loss to Ralph Yarborough.42

Bush’s arrival in Texas could not have come at a more opportune time. He not only brought new life to the state’s declining oil industry, but also to the Republican Party. In *Big Rich*, Burrough discusses the early partnership Bush formed in Midland with Hugh Liedtke, who would go on to produce the Texas giant Pennzoil while Bush made his fortune in offshore drilling. Burrough points out, however, that it was Bush’s move to Houston in 1959 that led to his friendships that would help catapult his political career. Thus, although Kennedy’s assassination and the 1964 elections shattered the momentum of the Texas Republicans, a rising star had emerged for the Republicans.

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Moreover, the party now in power was the first to have to confront the nation’s new but growing challenges. For instance, on the domestic front, Knaggs points out in *Two-Party Texas* that Johnson engineered the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which Deep South leaders, steeped in their devotion to states’ rights, denounced as the worst kind of federal encroachment. Consequently, the Republican Party provided a welcome alternative for both Democrats and Independents who were Jim Crow enthusiasts.

Furthermore, President Johnson’s vision of a “Great Society” resulted in the greatest burst of domestic reform since the New Deal, according to Campbell in *Gone to Texas*. Campbell points out, however, that when the costly and divisive war in Vietnam reached a climax in January 1968 with the Viet Cong’s Tet Offensive, it delivered the “knockout blow” that led Johnson to announce that he would not seek reelection. Consequently, large numbers of conservative Texans began to oppose the Democratic Party, blaming Johnson for the problems in Vietnam while opposing the Great Society’s welfare state measures and despising the counterculture of anti-war protestors. Hence, these conservative Democrats and Independents began looking to Texas’s Republican Party. 43

Knaggs points out in *Two-Party Texas* that, meanwhile, Republicans were relishing from John Tower’s reelection in 1966 and George Bush’s and Bob Price’s victories in congressional races. Knaggs also points to the state senate where the first Republican was elected since 1927 and the Texas House where two Republicans were added. Although these legislative gains seemed meager, Republicans were encouraged by the numerous close races, particularly in Harris and Dallas Counties, where a total of

sixteen Republican candidates polled between forty-four and forty-nine percent. Hence, in spite of earlier setbacks, Texas Republicans remained hopeful for the 1968 election. Meanwhile, peace talks with Vietnam continued at stalemate and Americans became more divided than ever, and, unfortunately for the Democratic Party, this divisiveness was epitomized at their national convention held in Chicago during August. As a horrified television audience watched events spin out of control, they began to associate unruliness and lawlessness with the Democratic Party, which seriously damaged Hubert H. Humphrey’s presidential candidacy. Consequently, Campbell points out in Gone to Texas that the Republican candidate, Nixon, who promised to end the Vietnam war and restore unity to the nation, seemed certain to carry Texas, and would have done so but for the emergence of third party candidate George Wallace of Alabama, a leader in the fight against integration. While Humphrey defeated Nixon in Texas 41 to 40 percent, Wallace garnered 19 percent of the state’s vote, most of whom would have supported Nixon had Wallace not run.44

Knaggs points out in Two-Party Texas that the only bright spots for Texas Republicans in 1968 were presidential patronage from Nixon’s victory and gubernatorial candidate Paul Eggers setting a new record for Republican vote-getting in this state while carrying three of the four most populous counties. Also, Campbell points out in Gone to Texas that Texas Republicans were handed another defeat in 1970 when Congressman George Bush was defeated by conservative Democrat Lloyd Bentsen, Jr. for Texas’s other seat in the United States Senate and Eggers lost his rematch with Preston Smith for

44 Knaggs, TwoParty Texas, 107; Campbell, Gone to Texas, 435-36.
the governorship. By the 1970s, however, Bridges points out in *Twilight of the Texas Democrats* that another factor was beginning to work in Texas’s Republicans favor: suburbanization. Suburbs became the focus of most of the growth of the South rather than the large central cities, particularly in Texas. According to Bridges, the new flux of suburban dwellers from the Midwest and East looking for employment accounted for approximately 15 percent of the state’s 27.1 percent population increase between 1970 and 1980. Moreover, because these migrants were mostly middle to upper-middle class voters who adhered to a conservative political philosophy, they helped swell the ranks of the Republican Party.45

Before the 1972 elections, Knaggs points out in *Two-Party Texas* that Texas Democrats were suddenly saddled by the “Sharpstown stock fraud scandal” and La Raza Unida, a militant Mexican-American movement in South Texas. While a number of Texas’s high ranking Democrats were implicated in the Sharpstown scandal, La Raza Unida fielded a number of statewide candidates who could potentially lure thousands of usually straight-ticket Democratic voters away to answer the ethnic call. Olien also makes clear in *From Token to Triumph* that Texas Republicans also smiled by the summer of 1972 when the Democrats were about to nominate Senator George McGovern of South Dakota for president. McGovern’s “doctrinaire liberalism” was anathema in most parts of Texas, and once he was nominated, Texas Republicans were convinced that the antiwar Democrat would have “reverse coattails” – that he would drive conservative Texas Democrats into the Republican column on the ballot. Consequently, Texas voters

reelected Tower and helped reelect Nixon with two-thirds of the state’s vote. Knaggs points out in *Two-Party Texas* that in the 1972 election Republicans also picked up seven State House seats, bringing the total to seventeen, and one State Senate seat, bringing that total to three. Although losing to Dolph Briscoe, Republican gubernatorial candidate Henry Grover polled a respectable 45 percent.46

In a doctoral dissertation entitled, “The Significance and Impact of Women on the Rise of the Republican Party in Twentieth Century Texas,” Kristi Throne Strickland points out that by 1972 the Texas Federation of Republican Women (TFRW) had grown to 6,132 members, making it the largest federation in the South and the fourteenth largest in the nation. Although Republican women had been instrumental in earlier campaign efforts, their impact would become greater following the 1972 election because the feminist movement would be the chief social issue influencing Texas politics until the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) was finally defeated in 1982. In *Republican Women: Feminism and Conservatism From Suffrage Through the Rise of the New Right*, Catherine E. Rymph points out that the Republican Party’s relation to the feminist movement was primarily dictated by the “new right” coalition that emerged from the party’s “Southern Strategy” in the late sixties. Rymph also explains why it was the Democratic Party that provided a home to the “second wave” feminists, who championed abortion, nonhierarchical, egalitarian organizations, and unconventional lifestyles. Thus, after the feminist movement came to a head in 1977 at the National Women’s Conference

in Houston, thousands of socially conservative Texas Democrats began to move into the Republican Party because of the radical ideas that their old party was now embracing.\footnote{Kristi Throne Strickland, “The Significance and Impact of Women on the Rise of the Republican Party in Twentieth Century Texas,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of North Texas, 2000), 202-203; Catherine E. Rymph, Republican Women: Feminism and Conservatism From Suffrage Through The Rise of the New Right (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 187.} While Texas’s social conservatives found themselves steeped in a battle against the ratification of the ERA after 1972, another event played into the hands of Texas Republicans. In August 1973, approximately three months after the death of Lyndon Baines Johnson, Democratic Party stalwart John Connally switched his allegiance to the Republican Party. In \textit{Two-Party Texas}, Knaggs describes the publicity generated by Connally’s move and subsequent impact upon the growth of Texas’s Republican Party. But as electrifying as Connally’s switch to the Republicans was, Olien points out in \textit{From Token to Triumph} that it was not enough to overcome the dark cloud of Watergate. Hence, Texas Republicans were once again relegated to the status of a sideshow in the arena of Texas politics. At the same time, however, Burrough points out in \textit{Big Rich} the booming impact that the Arab oil embargo was having upon Texas oil, thus revitalizing the flow of oil money to the Republican Party and pushing would-be oil finders like George Bush, Jr. into Texas. Moreover, by 1976 as the anti-feminist movement was gaining momentum, Olien points out that former California Governor Ronald Reagan was quickly gaining the support of conservative Texans, who portrayed Gerald Ford as the “accidental president” following Nixon’s resignation. Sean Cunningham points out in \textit{Cowboy Conservatism: Texas and the Rise of the Modern Right} that the persona of Reagan strengthened the relationship between Texas Republicans and the “New Right”
coalition. Thus, when Reagan outdistanced Ford in 1976 by a two-to-one margin in Texas’s Republican primary, it clearly showed that Reagan’s brand of conservatism resonated heavily among Texas Republicans. 48

Reagan ended up losing the Republican nomination by a slim margin, and Democrat Jimmy Carter defeated Gerald Ford in the November election. In Texas, however, Carter won only 51.6 percent of the vote, which revived the hope of Texas Republicans. In both Two-Party Texas and From Token to Triumph, Knaggs and Olien explain how Texas Republicans’ hopes were further revived when their oil millionaire candidate William Clements defeated Democrat John Hill in the 1978 gubernatorial race. In what many believed to be impossible, Clements managed to pull off the political upset of the decade by defeating Hill by only seven-tenths of one percent of the statewide vote. In addition to his campaign purse, Olien also attributes Clements’ upset victory to the Republican women’s campaign efforts. Knaggs points out that Texas Republicans could also rejoice in Tower’s third consecutive senate victory and picking up three seats in the Texas House. Thus, by 1978, Democratic divisions, the backlash from the feminist movement and Connally’s switching to the Republican Party had regenerated the momentum of Texas Republicans. This time that momentum would not be interrupted, particularly when, according to Knaggs’ Two-Party Texas the proposed “split primary” by the Democrats and ensuing flight of the “Killer Bees” in Spring 1980 revealed that the state’s conservative Democratic leadership was not opposed to changing old statutes if it meant retaining control of the state. Consequently, greater seeds of doubt were sowed

48Knaggs, Two-Party Texas, 178; Olien, From Token to Triumph, 234-38; Cunningham, Cowboy Conservatism, 186-88.
among members of their own constituency, who, like Connally, were dismayed at the direction the party was moving, and therefore changed their allegiances to the Republican Party. 49

Toward the end of Carter’s presidency, as the country was reeling from double digit inflation, an energy crisis, and the Iranian hostage crisis, the time was ripe for the Republicans to recapture the White House. Thus, while Reagan defeated Bush in the 1980 presidential primary, the results of the general election came as no surprise as Reagan easily defeated Carter in Texas as well as the nation. Moreover, Knaggs points out in Two-Party Texas that Republicans picked up four wins in the State Senate and thirteen wins in the Texas House. According to Sean P. Cunningham’s Cowboy Conservatism, Reagan’s popularity would serve as the primary catalyst for Texas becoming a two-party state. By 1982, however, Governor Clements’ reelection campaign found itself in a heap of trouble primarily because of the nation and state’s economic downturn. In Gone to Texas, Campbell also points out that Clements did not have the luxury of running against a divided state Democratic Party. Consequently, Republicans lost every statewide race, including the governorship; however, it was not enough to overcome the enormity and persona of Reagan. Campbell points out that the national Democratic Party helped make it easy for Texas voters in the 1984 elections when they nominated the avowedly liberal team, Walter Mondale of Minnesota and Geraldine Ferraro of New York. Consequently, Reagan’s brand of conservatism pitted against the liberalism of Mondale and Ferraro was no match for conservative minded Texans as

49 Knaggs, Two-Party Texas, 230-31, 235-37; Olien, From Token to Triumph, 243; 259-64.
Reagan won 64 percent of the state’s vote. Campbell also points out that Reagan’s coattails helped his party in the state legislature and Congress as well. Republicans increased their numbers to 52 in the Texas House, 6 in the state senate, and 10 in the United States House of Representatives. Moreover, Republicans held on to retired Senator John Tower’s seat when former Democratic Congressman Phil Gramm switched to the Republican Party in 1983 and won re-election from the same district as a Republican.50

Although Republicans had been shut out in statewide races in 1982, by 1986 the collapse in oil prices, Governor Mark White’s unpopular policies, and the lingering coattail effect of Reagan’s reelection as president led to Clements’ reelection as governor. In Gone to Texas, Campbell addresses White’s educational reform package, which included the highly unpopular teacher competency test and the “no-pass, no-play” provision, which drew the ire of Texas educators and football fans across the state. Consequently, Clements defeated White in a rematch with 53 percent of the state’s vote. Although Clements’s second term became defined by a scandal in the football program at Southern Methodist University known as “Ponygate,” it did not result in losses for Texas Republicans. Campbell points out that in the 1988 presidential election, the Republicans ran Bush, Reagan’s vice president, and Senator Dan Quayle of Indiana against Michael S. Dukakis, liberal governor of Massachusetts, and Senator Lloyd Bentsen. 51

50 Knaggs, Two-Party Texas, 250; Cunningham, Cowboy Conservatism, 209; Campbell, Gone to Texas, 450-451.
51 Campbell, Gone to Texas, 452-53.
Although Bush and Bentsen gave each party a Texas connection, the Democrats hoped that their highly popular senator would overmatch the Connecticut-born Bush, who had spent little time in the state while serving as Vice President. Bush’s absence, however, was overcome by his friend and campaign manager James A. Baker III, who ran a campaign picturing Dukakis as an unpatriotic liberal who favored gun control and pardoned dangerous criminals like Willie Horton, a black man who was imprisoned for murder but committed another serious crime while free on a furlough given by Dukakis. Meanwhile, Dukakis’s campaign, in spite of having Lloyd Bentsen as his running mate, did not resonate with most conservative Texas, which resulted in Bush receiving 56 percent of the vote. Moreover, having also won their first “down-ticket” statewide state offices, sweeping three consecutive presidential races by landslide margins, winning two of the last three gubernatorial races while bringing their totals to fifty-two in the Texas House and six in the State Senate, Republicans now, according to Campbell, could legitimately claim two-party status for Texas. Texas would function as a two-party state until 1998 when George W. Bush won his second term as governor in a landslide, Republicans swept every other statewide race, and gained a majority in the Senate. 52

In sum, prohibition, the liberal policies of the Roosevelt and Truman administrations, the rise of Texas oil and urbanization were the underlying factors contributing to the revitalization of Texas’s Republican Party from the early 1900s until Eisenhower’s victories. Chief factors that continued to precipitate Republican growth during the 1960s were continuing urbanization, the election of John Tower, backlash

52 Campbell, Gone to Texas, 453-54, 463.
from the Civil Rights Acts and other Great Society programs, and the Vietnam War.
Republican gains in the 1970s and early 1980s can be attributed primarily to government scandal, the rebound of Texas oil and suburbanization, anti-feminism, and Reagan conservatism, all of which coalesced in 1988 to make Texas a two-party state.
Republican ascendancy in Texas during the twentieth century, however, should also be attributed to the efforts of the Texas Federation of Republican Women (TFRW), who became the chief grass roots organizers for the Republican Party beginning with Eisenhower’s campaign in 1952. The underlying factor, however, in precipitating a two-party state throughout the twentieth century was the increasing liberal focus of the National Democratic Party and its subsequent influence upon Texas’s Democratic Party. The National Democratic Party’s embracement of big government, federal regulation of state agencies, civil rights and other Great Society programs, labor unions, and non-traditional life styles undermined the traditional values of conservative Texans. In the remaining chapters of this dissertation, primary sources will be used to provide more insight into the various stages of the republican surge in Texas, and to define more accurately how the growing liberalism within the National Democratic Party impacted developments at the state and local levels of government.
CHAPTER 2
EARLY DIVISIONS

With the formation of Texas’s Anti-Saloon League in 1907, the movement for statewide action was strengthened, and in the winter of 1908 a coalition of prohibition organizations campaigned to have the legislature present a constitutional amendment for statewide prohibition to the voters. In 1914, however, Progressives and prohibitionists had an even greater reason to rejoice when they acquired President Woodrow Wilson’s endorsement of their gubernatorial candidate, Tom Ball. Because of President Wilson’s evangelical religious posture, moralistic rhetoric, and allegiance to “clean” government, Progressive and prohibition Democrats sought to attain through him the supremacy they had long forfeited to their conservative foes. Although Wilson’s endorsement was not enough to help catapult Ball to victory over the anti-prohibitionists’ charismatic candidate “Farmer” Jim Ferguson, battle lines within Texas’s Democratic Party were clearly drawn between “wets” and “drys.” Because the Republican Party in Texas at that time, however, was essentially a “historical vestige,” long past challenging the majority party for control of the state, “drys” were forced to fight the battle from within.1

World War I accentuated the divisions within Texas’s Democrats after the United States entered the war in April 1917 and Congress passed the Selective Service Act the

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following month. Consequently, Texas became the training grounds for several hundred thousand troops as more than thirty army training camps located in the state. The largest of these were Camp McArthur at Waco, Camp Logan at Houston, Camp Travis at San Antonio, and Camp Bowie at Fort Worth. The anticipation of a large military camp in San Antonio, however, attracted the worst elements from every part of the state. No less than a thousand prostitutes were licensed and permitted to ply their trade both inside and outside the limits of the city. The same proved true for El Paso, Fort Worth, and Houston, as the influx of soldiers to these areas produced conditions favorable for prostitution. More importantly, however, for prohibitionists, the “Infamous saloon” surrounding the training camps provided easy access to alcohol for soldiers in training.  

Because of the deplorable conditions surrounding training camps, prohibitionists realized that the war had provided them a wonderful opportunity to achieve their cherished goals. Hence, the protection of soldiers from the temptations of vice and alcohol not only became vital to America’s war effort, but also served as a catalyst for the prohibitionist movement. Consequently, in the 1918 Democratic primary, prohibitionist candidate William P. Hobby soundly defeated the embattled anti-prohibitionist candidate “Farmer” Jim Ferguson, who, although impeached in 1917 for misuse of state funds and shady financial relations with brewers, was determined to uphold the family motto of “never say die, say damn!” Ferguson’s iniquities and the ensuing revelations from his impeachment trial,

however, left the anti-prohibitionists “practically wrecked.” Consequently, one year later statewide prohibition became law and the Eighteenth Amendment was ratified.  

Although Progressives and prohibitionists celebrated their victory, divisions within the state’s Democrats continued to widen over prohibition as the Eighteenth Amendment and the prosperity from the “roaring twenties” facilitated the rise of moonshiners and bootleggers. Thousands of Texans at all levels of society, from the elite in their country clubs to the poorest white tenant farmers and blacks in urban ghettos simply would not obey the law against the production, sale, and consumption of alcoholic beverages. Their demand for liquor provided the impetus for illegal distilleries at home and smuggling from Mexico. Bootleggers made fortunes in the underground alcohol industry and, ironically, teamed with prohibitionists to see that the state did not legalize liquor again. Recalling the impact that prohibition had on the state’s elections throughout the 1920s, President Lyndon B. Johnson told members of the President’s Council on Aging in 1965 that “all I heard was whether you were wet or dry, whether for the courthouse group or against them.” Thus, it came as no surprise in the 1920 gubernatorial race when prohibitionist candidate Pat M. Neff was touted by one of his friends as someone who had “never shot a gun, baited a fish hook, used tobacco in any form, nor drunk anything stronger than Brazos water.”

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3 Campbell, Gone to Texas, 366, 358; Brown, Hood, Bonnet, and Little Brown Jug, 217.
After splitting the Progressive vote with two other candidates in the Democratic primary, Neff defeated anti-prohibitionist candidate Joseph W. Bailey in the runoff, thus ensuring his victory over Republican J.G. Culberson in the general election. By the end of Governor Neff’s second term, however, the issue of prohibition had been complicated by the divisiveness wrought by the Ku Klux Klan, whose membership in Texas had by that time reached 170,000, thereby allowing it to gain control of Texas’s delegation to the 1924 Democratic national convention. After the Klan nominated District Judge Felix D. Robertson of Dallas for governor, “Farmer Jim” Ferguson decided to test the merits of his impeachment once again by throwing his hat in the ring less than two months before the Democratic primary. When the Texas Supreme Court upheld the ban resulting from his earlier conviction, “Farmer Jim” entered his forty-nine-year-old wife Miriam A. “Ma” in the contest as the anti-Klan candidate and cries of “Two Governors for the Price of One” began to resound across the state. Although the amount of publicity generated by Ma possibly becoming the first woman governor of any state was immeasurable, the Klan became the underlying issue of the primary and swung many people who never could have imagined supporting anyone associated with “Pa” Ferguson over to “Ma’s” camp. Consequently, after the Democratic runoff in August, “Fergusonism” became reality in Texas. 4

Although “Ma’s” candidacy and the Fergusons anti-Klan position garnered them ample support across the state in the 1924 general election, Ma’s victory was subdued by Pa’s anti-prohibitionist history and the scores of pro-Klan and anti-Ferguson Democrats

4 Campbell, Gone to Texas, 371-372; Brown, Hood, Bonnet, and Little Brown Jug, 217; Brown, “Texas in the 1920s.”
who were outraged at the thought of ‘Pa’ returning to power through his wife. Anti-Klan prohibitionists were reassured by “Ma” Ferguson’s life-long opposition to whiskey and her pledge not to weaken the liquor laws and to stop the sale of drugstore whiskey. In the general election, Republicans maintained prohibition as a central focus by reminding voters that the “fight waged for a century in the interest of the country against the demon liquor is now in the balance” while broadsides continued to remind the voters of the Ferguson’s “politically wet” past. Hence, on Election Day, ‘Ma’ presented a dilemma not only to those pro-Klan and anti-Ferguson Democrats, but also to those staunch ‘drys’ who could not entrust the Fergusons to enforce prohibition. The answer to that dilemma was the Republican Party, which easily had its best showing since Reconstruction by capturing 294,970 votes to ‘Ma’s 422, 558. Republican candidates for governor since 1916 had averaged just below 60,000 votes, but George C. Butte in 1924 carried fifty-five counties and received almost three times as many votes as any previous Republican candidate for governor. Consequently, the Republicans held their first ever primary two years later because the Terrell Election Laws of 1903 and 1905 required it of any party whose candidate received over 100,000 votes in the preceding election. 5

“Ma” Ferguson’s victory and the migration of tens of thousands of Texas voters from the Democratic to the Republican Party in the 1924 gubernatorial race not only signaled the decline of the Ku Klux Klan as a political force in Texas but also revealed

that prohibition was still as divisive an issue as before. This divisiveness culminated in the 1928 national election, when, for the first time ever, a Republican presidential candidate carried Texas. With the nomination of Governor Al Smith of New York as the Democratic standard bearer, the Texas Republicans began to take heart. Smith represented the urban-oriented labor and immigrant leaders of the Northeast as opposed to the older states’ rights, rural conservatives who dominated the South. Also, in addition to being “as wet as the Atlantic Ocean,” Smith was a devout Catholic, which only exacerbated his problems in Texas, since it was an overwhelmingly Protestant state during the 1920s. Hence, prohibitionists and Protestants combined in 1928 to put Texas in the Republican column for the first time ever in a presidential election. Herbert Hoover carried Texas by a vote of 367,242 to 340,080 for Smith. 6

Instrumental to Hoover’s victory in Texas were the ultra-dry Democrats who organized as the “Anti-Al Smith Democrats of Texas” or “Hoovercrats,” whose task was to persuade fellow Democrats to vote for Hoover for president while at the same time supporting their Democratic local, county, and state tickets. Consequently, the Republican Party once again became a viable alternative for Texas Democrats who were torn over the issue of prohibition as tens of thousands of them voted the Republican presidential ticket. Seth S. McKay, a noted Texas political historian, concluded that “in Texas as a whole the 1928 Presidential campaign was just another prohibition contest,” while Governor Dan Moody thought prohibition was the “determining factor” of the election and thus “responsible for the great defection from the Democratic Party.”

6 Brown, “Texas in the 1920s;” Casdorph, Republican Party of Texas, 136; Campbell, Gone to Texas, 375.
Therefore, by 1928, the divisiveness wrought by prohibition had breathed life into Texas’s Republicans, who were earlier thought to be either non-existent or dormant. More importantly, for Texas’s Republican Party, this divisiveness provided a precedent for Texas Democratic Party regulars to follow in future elections.\(^7\)

Although a precedent of switching parties was established, it was not done without a sense of utter betrayal. In Texas, the Democratic Party was not just simply the majority party. It was the party of Andrew Jackson, or the “party of the fathers,” that once defined the old “Solid South.” More important for Texans, it was the party of their ancestors who had triumphed over Radical Reconstruction and the government of “Republican carpetbagger” Edmund J. Davis. Hence, if a Democrat voted Republican in Texas during the 1920s, it could be likened to a Southern Baptist switching his membership to the Catholic Church. It was unorthodox at the very least, particularly in a state where only four Republicans served in the legislature between 1920 and 1930. Hence, when large numbers of Texas Democrats cast their lot with the Republicans in 1924 and 1928, charges of “political hypocrite” and “party traitor” began to abound. Dallas County Judge W.M. Pierson reflected the feeling shared by the majority of Texas Democrats when he told a *Dallas Morning News* reporter that if it ever got to the point that his individual opinion went against the collective opinion of several hundred thousand of his fellow Democrats, rather than vote Republican, “I will get me a red flag and join the Bolsheviks in real earnest. . . I am a Democrat; my father was a Democrat. . .

I have always in the past, and will always in the future vote the Democratic ticket straight.”

Out of 1,500,000 registered voters in the state, less than 700,000 cast a vote in 1928, which showed that for several hundred thousand Democrats in Texas, the solution to having the “wet-Catholic Smith” as their presidential candidate was to stay home and not vote at all rather than vote Republican. Although Republican W.H. Holmes received 123,325 votes in the gubernatorial race, he was easily defeated by the popular Democratic incumbent Dan Moody. Still, a Republican candidate had once again garnered over 100,000 votes, which required another Republican primary in 1930. Republican gubernatorial candidate William E. Talbot won only 62,344 votes in the 1930 race; however, when “Ma” Ferguson threw her hat in the ring for the 1932 gubernatorial race, Republicans once again took heart as scores of anti-Ferguson and prohibition Democrats deserted their party and supported Republican candidate Orville Bullington. Even Governor Ross Sterling bolted to the Republican cause, and the normally Democratic Houston Post showed voters how they could split the ticket to vote for Bullington while still supporting the other Democratic nominees. Consequently, on the day of election, the Texas Republicans achieved another milestone as Bullington polled

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317,970 votes, the most ever polled by a Republican gubernatorial candidate since Reconstruction.9

Unfortunately for Texas’s Republicans, however, 1932 also marked the year when their party entered an extended period of hibernation. The stock market crash of 1929 and ensuing depression precipitated the end of national Republican hegemony as the economic crisis was increasingly interpreted as a Republican phenomenon. Moreover, along with the inauguration of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1933 came the loss of patronage, which was controlled by South Texas political boss R.B. Creager, whose dual role as Republican state chairman and national committeeman enticed him to foster his own political ends rather than grow the state’s party. Hence, after 1932 the organizational and electioneering activities of the Republican Party in Texas succumbed to “lethargy and indolence.” From 1934 until 1948, Republican candidates in state elections received on average less than 10 percent of the total vote. A low point was reached in 1938 when Alexander Boynton, running against W. Lee O’Daniel, received slightly less than 3 percent of the gubernatorial vote. Texas Republicans also felt the impact of Roosevelt’s call for an end to prohibition after he was elected in 1932. The Twenty-first Amendment was sent to the states in February 1933 and received the requisite number of ratifications in December, and prohibition for Texas ended two years later. Thus, the chief issue which had served to undergird the growth of the Republicans in Texas for years was suddenly moot. Consequently, large numbers of once disgruntled

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Democrats who had voted Republican in the 1924, 1928, and 1932 elections restored allegiances to their old party.\(^{10}\)

Although Republican blame for the onset of the Great Depression and the end of prohibition brought renewed vigor to the Democratic Party in Texas, a new source of dissension began to fester within it. The source of dissension stemmed from Roosevelt’s New Deal. The New Deal’s emphasis upon federal efforts to regulate and order the national economy drew the ire of many Texas Democrats, who, having been indoctrinated in states’ rights, felt very strongly about any potential encroachment by the federal government to control the state’s resources. Consequently, a new schism arose within Texas’s Democratic ranks. On one side were the “modernists,” ardent New Deal supporters represented in Washington by Sam Rayburn and his protégé, Lyndon B. Johnson. They were pitted against the “traditionalists,” those riding the new tide of oil money from the East Texas field discoveries and other wealthy businessmen devoutly opposed to the New Deal. Traditionalists shared a strong abhorrence of taxes, labor organizers, and anyone who looked to undermine their ways. Roosevelt was the first president since Reconstruction to try to do so indirectly.\(^ {11}\)

By the mid-1930s, after many New Deal programs had been enacted in Texas, taxes were increasing. Homeowners received protection against foreclosures, which angered those in real estate and banking. New labor standards and union growth drove up

\(^{10}\) Olien, *From Token to Triumph*, 1-29; Kingston, Attlesey, and Crawford, *The Texas Almanac’s Political History of Texas*, 291-95; Campbell, *Gone to Texas*, 387.

wages, and consequently the cost of doing business. Poor families received job assistance
from the federal Works Progress Administration, thus stealing the power from political
bosses. Farm programs helped thousands of Texans but also upset landlord-tenant
relationships. Hence, to traditionalists, new federal programs were encroaching upon
areas historically within the jurisdiction of county, city, and state leaders. Coming in a
state where self-reliance was still considered a virtue and states’ rights sacred, it created
new problems and, to compound matters, the rules for the welfare revolution were not
made in Austin, but Washington. Equally troublesome, the Roosevelts were outwardly
helping blacks and other minorities, which did not sit well with Texans, most of whom
were unashamed in their support of white supremacy. Everywhere traditionalists looked,
it seemed as though the federal government was intruding into their affairs. For many,
there was no distinction between socialism and the New Deal.12

By 1935, largely because of the efforts of East Texas lumber baron John H.
Kirby, Texas’s first industrial millionaire, the ground swell of anti-New Deal sentiment
within Texas’s Democratic ranks reached new proportions. After seeing his empire
crumble during the Great Depression, Kirby filed for bankruptcy in May 1933. By then,
the seventy-three-year-old Kirby was deeply embittered, and much of his animus was
directed at President Roosevelt. Consequently, Kirby hired his friend Vance Muse, an
anti-tax publicist, to establish a series of anti-New Deal lobbying organizations. Thanks
to Muse, the Kirby Building in downtown Houston became home to a number of

12 Burrough, Big Rich, 127-128; George Norris Green, The Establishment in Texas Politics: The
Primitive Years, 1938-1957 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979), 15; Patenaude, Texans, Politics and
the New Deal, 104; Campbell, Gone to Texas, 383, 389.
interconnected ultraconservative groups, all devoted to promoting white supremacy, fighting labor unions and communism, but, above all, defeating Roosevelt’s reelection in 1936. The most ambitious of these groups was the Southern Committee to Uphold the Constitution, or SCUC, which was viewed as a southern counterpart to the northern Liberty League, a group of reactionary anti-New Deal millionaires funded in large part by the Du Pont family.13

Kirby’s SCUC was also spurred by the discovery of the East Texas oil field in October 1930 when Columbus M. “Dad” Joiner and A.D. “Doc” Lloyd watched Daisy Bradford No. 3 in Rusk County come in at sixty-eight hundred barrels a day. The rampant leasing and drilling that followed, however, led to excessive production, thus dropping the price of Texas crude oil from ninety-nine cents per barrel to forty-six cents by 1931. As the price of oil continued to drop, “hot oil” became the new commodity for East Texas independent operators. Hot oil was that which was produced in excess of Railroad Commission orders, siphoned from pipelines and piped into tanker trucks that made nightly smuggling runs into Louisiana and Oklahoma. Because of its limited capabilities, however, the Texas Railroad Commission was unable to stop the flow of hot oil. As overproduction continued to lower oil prices and glut the national market, Humble and other major companies appealed directly to President Roosevelt. The new president responded by signing an executive order on July 14, 1933, to enforce the regulation of crude production. Hence, Section 9 (e) of the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) in

1933 authorized federal interdiction of interstate shipments of oil produced in violation of state conservation regulations.¹⁴

In spite of federal intervention, hot oil production increased throughout the early months of 1934. Independent producers believed that federal legislation to curb hot oil practices was no more than a scheme hatched by the major oil companies to squeeze them out of East Texas. Consequently, one of the largest battles ever fought within the Texas legislature developed between those who supported the major oil companies as opposed to those who supported the independents. In June 1935, when the United States Supreme Court overturned the subsection of the NIRA that outlawed hot oil, tempers rose among Texas’s lawmakers. In order to maintain control of the interstate movement of hot oil, the United States Congress quickly passed the Connally Hot Oil Act in February, 1935. The Texas legislature, however, more narrowly defined its position on May 11, by enacting the Texas Hot Oil Statute, which declared hot oil as contraband and allowed its confiscation and sale by the state. Afterwards, George Burns of Huntsville, a representative of the major companies in the Texas House, was assaulted by “six or seven oilmen” in the lobby of Austin’s Stephen F. Austin Hotel. Reflecting on his time in the legislature during the hot oil hearings, former Denton County Representative Bullock Hyder remarked, “hardest fight I ever engaged in.” Hyder, who sided with the major

companies, feared to the point of taking his father’s “pocket automatic” back to Austin with him for the heated legislative sessions. 15

Unsurprisingly, Texas Republicans did not realize the magnitude of what was taking place in East Texas or within Texas’s legislature. The hot oil wars were not only creating another split within the Democratic Party, but also laying the foundation for a movement that would eventually help to undergird a political transformation of the state. Joining Kirby’s SCUC were a who’s who of Lone Star oilmen, including Roy Cullen, Big Jim West, George Strake, and Clint Murchison. Another of Kirby’s allies was Maco Stewart of Galveston, who after making a fortune in real estate titles, saw his wealth multiply when Humble found oil on land he owned south of Houston. The most extreme of Kirby’s circle was George W. Armstrong, a Fort Worth oilman who owned Texas Steel. An unsuccessful candidate for Texas governor in 1932, Armstrong was also known as a rabid racist and anti-Semite, and he had been a top organizer of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s and later emerged as one of the country’s leading suppliers of anti-Semitic hate literature. Kirby’s Anti-Roosevelt coalition of Texas oilmen as well as southern businessmen believed that Washington’s regulation of their private business was un-American. Thus, these men’s fortunes would financially undergird the beginning of an ultraconservative movement that would culminate in a two-party state by 1988. 16


16 Campbell, Gone to Texas, 406; 447-63; Young, “The Democratic Party;” Burrough, Big Rich, 130-31, 84, 86.
In forming the SCUC, Kirby had hoped to forge an anti-Roosevelt alliance behind a presidential ticket of Louisiana’s charismatic governor Huey Long and the fifty-one-year-old governor of Georgia, Eugene Talmadge. Long’s assassination in September 1935, however, forced Kirby to switch to Talmadge, who accepted Kirby’s invitation to deliver the keynote address at the SCUC’s first convention on January 29, 1936, in Macon, Georgia. Approximately 3,500 Southern Democrats gathered at the Dempsey Hotel to unite in a common opposition to the New Deal, Negroes, and the teachings of Karl Marx by repudiating President Roosevelt as their party leader and calling upon Governor Talmadge to lead them in a holy war to drive the “Communists” from Washington. Kirby introduced the Georgia governor as “a plumed knight on an errand for the Republic, refusing to bend his knee to dictatorship or barter the sovereign rights of a great people for Federal gold.” On the irony of the South being summoned for the first time ever to challenge the course of the party it had put in power, Kirby remarked, “But if Franklin D. Roosevelt is a Democrat, Sherman’s march to the sea was a Yankee retreat.”

Issues of racism and states’ rights also found their way into the convention protocol. Each convention delegate received a copy of Georgia Women’s World, which assailed President Roosevelt for comparing himself to Andrew Jackson at the recent Jackson Day celebration by stating, “Andrew Jackson didn’t appoint a Negro Assistant Attorney General . . . a Negro confidential clerk in the White House . . . and when Andrew Jackson got to be President he didn’t put in Republicans, Socialists, Communists

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and Negroes to tell him how to run these good old United States.” The magazine also included pictures of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt being escorted by black ROTC officers at Howard University. Governor Talmadge reminded his audience that states’ rights were “in the balance today more than they were in the days of 1861 . . . Today, in every capital of the various States and in every county seat in America, the Federal Government is working consistently to tear down States’ rights.”

Unfortunately for Kirby and the SCUC, Alabama senator Hugo Black took offense at the photos of Mrs. Roosevelt – the “nigger photos,” they came to be called – and summoned Kirby and Vance Muse before a Senate committee in April 1936. It was Muse who sunk the SCUC when he admitted that it had been funded by northern industrialists. Kirby, however, was not finished. By June he had formed another group, the Constitutional Democrats of Texas, which became part of an anti-Roosevelt convention in Detroit in August. There, Kirby, former congressman Joseph W. Bailey Jr., and J. Evetts Haley, chairman of the new group, joined anti-New Dealers from twenty-one other states and coalesced into a national organization, the Jeffersonian Democrats. The stated objective of the Jeffersonians was to turn the Democratic Party back to the people. The theme of the Texas membership was that the New Deal was un-American and a threat to the institutions that Texans cherished and respected. Hence, the

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Jeffersonian Democrats constituted the first serious, organized and well financed effort that united disenchanted Democrats with Republicans to oppose the New Deal.19

In addition to oilmen and businessmen, the Texas membership of the Jeffersonians was composed of lawyers, farmers, and ranchers, all of which numbered roughly 5,000. The main publication for the Texas Jeffersonians was a paper called The Jeffersonian Democrat. First published on September 23, 1936 with a 250,000 first edition, its main theme was that the New Deal was un-American and a threat to Texas institutions. Moreover, it equated New Deal philosophy with the “destruction of private enterprise, local self-government and eventual enslavement of people.” Before the end of the campaign, 1,850,000 copies of The Jeffersonian Democrat were distributed, with the last two issues sent to all rural mail boxes in Texas. In spite of their efforts, however, Kirby and his allies were overwhelmed by Roosevelt’s personal popularity in the 1936 election. Hoping to persuade at least one-third of Texas’s voters to support Republican candidate Alfred Landon, Texas Jeffersonians fell far short as Roosevelt won 742,243 votes to Landon’s 102,904. Disheartened, Kirby withdrew from political life and spent his last years on his East Texas farm where he died in 1940. But along with Kirby’s demise came hope for the Republican Party in Texas. Kirby left behind the foundation of an ultraconservative movement, and at its core were “nouveau riche” oilmen. New

personalities such as Maco Stewart, Jr., Marrs McLean of Beaumont, and others eager for a political fight joined Kirby’s old guard. 20

The fight the Jeffersonians were hoping for came in February of 1937 when President Roosevelt unveiled his “court packing” plan to the public. Determined not to see another one of his New Deal programs struck down after watching a conservative Supreme Court declare unconstitutional the Agricultural Adjustment Act (1933) and the National Industrial Recovery Act (1934), Roosevelt interpreted his reelection as a mandate by the American people to ensure that the Social Security Act (1935) and National Labor Relations Act (1935) also were not struck down. Therefore, once he began his second term, he proposed a reorganization of the federal court system that allowed the president to appoint an additional justice up to a total of six to the Supreme Court for every member of the court who reached the age of seventy and did not retire. It just so happened that six of the current justices happened to be seventy or older. Thus, the proposal would allow Roosevelt to appoint the maximum number immediately and raise the court’s membership from nine to fifteen. Never before had such dictatorial powers been assumed by the chief executive. “A greatly dangerous precedent,” remarked New York Governor Herbert H. Lehman, “which could be availed of . . . for the purpose of oppression or for the curtailment of the constitutional rights of our citizens.”21

After President Roosevelt’s plan was made public on February 5, opposition began to be heard from millions of Americans, particularly in Texas, where outcries of

20 Patenaude, _Texans, Politics, and the New Deal_, 112-14; 119; Campbell, _Gone to Texas_, 390; Burrough, _Big Rich_, 133-34.

21 Campbell, _Gone to Texas_, 390; Patenaude, _Texans, Politics and the New Deal_, 121; “Dangerous Precedent, Court Plan Branded By Governor Lehman,” _Dallas Morning News_, July 20, 1937.
“unconstitutional” and “dictator” began to resound. While many of the state’s key political and business leaders opposed the bill, the opposition from a few Texans in Washington was, in the final analysis, most important. Vice-President John Nance Garner, Senator Tom Connally, and Congressman Hatton Sumners insisted that Roosevelt was going too far and threatening constitutional government. Garner, already angry over Roosevelt’s refusal to denounce sit-down strikes, unsuccessfully sought some form of compromise and then went fishing for six weeks rather than help the President. Although Congressmen Maury Maverick and Senator Morris Sheppard loyally supported Roosevelt, they faced pressure from home in the form of a resolution passed by the Texas Senate requesting all the state’s representatives in Washington to oppose the bill. The resolution termed the President’s proposal as “one of the most revolutionary in the history of this country.” The Texas Bar Association, organizations of businessmen, and most of the state’s big-city newspapers also condemned it. Nevertheless, because of the majority support for Roosevelt’s plan in the Texas House and among Texans in general, the difference in philosophy between old-school conservatism in the Democratic Party and the New Dealers became more pronounced.22

Although Texans alone could not have defeated Roosevelt’s plan, they played a leading role as the struggle came to a close in the fall of 1937 without any change in the federal court system. In Texas, however, the Supreme Court issue served as a rallying point for the real beginning of overt establishment opposition to Roosevelt and the New

Deal. In his definitive study of Texas conservatism, *The Establishment in Texas Politics*, George Norris Green distinguishes 1938 as the year oil-backed ultraconservatives took control of the state’s political structure. George W. Armstrong wrote to Kirby in March of that year calling for them to “organize Texas and to defeat some of the New Deal congressmen.” Consequently, in the mid-term elections, two outspoken pro-Roosevelt congressmen, W.D. McFarlane and the fiery progressive Maury Maverick of San Antonio, were defeated. More importantly, however, oil-and-business-backed flour salesman W. Lee “Pappy” O’Daniel won the governorship. O’Daniel’s victory initiated two decades of ultraconservative rule. As governor, O’Daniel became Texas oil’s reliable partner, freezing wellhead taxes and backing oil industry lobbyists’ takeover of the Railroad Commission. His administration was also dominated by ultraconservatives, many of them oilmen, including his key financial backer, Maco Stewart. 23

Following the court fight and the 1938 elections, polarization of Texas’s Democratic Party into New Deal and conservative groups became more defined while disdain for Roosevelt and the New Deal among leading ultraconservatives grew to a fever pitch. Kirby’s disdain for Roosevelt was such that he feared it might “imperil” his hope of religious salvation. Kirby saw nothing in the present conditions except “ultimate chaos and probably slavery for the citizens of America.” President Roosevelt’s decision to seek an unprecedented third term, which ruined Vice President Garner’s chances of becoming the first Texas-born nominee for the presidency, brought many more important Texans

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who already disliked the New Deal into open opposition against Roosevelt and the
Democratic Party. Once Texas’s delegation joined other states at the Democratic national
convention in supporting a third term for Roosevelt, Clara Driscoll, national Democratic
committee woman from Texas, stormed out telling everyone that as far as she was
concerned “the party could go to hell.” Former Texas Congressman Joseph W. Bailey Jr.
joined Jeffersonian Democrats in an Anti-Third Term Group Meeting calling for a “third
ticket” or support of Republican presidential candidate Wendell Willkie. More telling,
however, was that in one of the nation’s strongest Democratic states, neither the governor
nor the vice president of the United States, perhaps the two most powerful Texas
Democrats, endorsed President Roosevelt’s reelection.24

Although Roosevelt won his third term, the turmoil created from his “court packing”
plan and the shattering of the no-third-term tradition that had stood for more than 150
years was the “harbinger of internecine warfare” that would continue to polarize the
Democratic Party for years to come. That warfare now pitted the Garner Democrats, who
joined many of the old Jeffersonians against the New Deal Democrats. Four years later,
this new coalition of ultraconservatives, “whipped to a near-frenzy” by Roosevelt’s
wartime price controls on oil and other commodities, mounted their most serious
challenge to the President to date. After capturing the first state convention in May, they
hoped to seize control of the Texas Democratic Party, promising to withhold the state’s
electoral votes in the event that Roosevelt was nominated for a fourth term. In September,

24 Patenaude, Texans, Politics and the New Deal, 163; Kirby to Armstrong, May 22, 1939; file
335, Box 141-144, Armstrong MSS; Campbell, Gone to Texas, 394; Green, Establishment in Texas
Term Group Meeting,” Dallas Morning News, July 23, 1940.
however, they were defeated by only 29 votes at the second state convention. According to former Texas Senator and House Member T.H. McGregor, a “definite anti-Roosevelt majority of more than 70 convention votes” surrendered to “purchase, pressure, and blackmail” the day before the convention, thus allowing New Dealers to claim the convention’s prize. Hence, the results of the September state convention in no way reflected the strength of the anti-New Deal sentiment brewing in Texas. 25

Outraged by the shenanigans at the second state convention, ultraconservatives formed a third party, the Texas Regulars, hoping to divert enough Democratic votes to prevent Roosevelt from defeating Republican Thomas E. Dewey. Yet the Regulars, who had a program but no actual candidate, were not likely to vote for Dewey since the Republican Party was committed to repealing the poll tax and establishing the New Deal’s Fair Employment Practices Commission [FEPC] as a permanent bureau, which meant social equality, the repeal of segregation laws, and racial degradation. George W. Armstrong wrote to members of Texas’s delegation to the national convention that there was “no substantial difference” between the Republican platform and the Roosevelt administration, essentially the difference between “tweedledum and tweedledee.” J.A. “Tiny” Gooch, Chairman of the Advisory Committee for the Regulars, warned members that a vote for the Republican ticket “splits our strength,” resulting in a “Fourth Term.” The Regulars’ membership was dominated by corporate kingpins and oilmen, including

lobbyists from all the major oil companies active in Texas, as well as independents like Maco Stewart and Arch Rowan of Fort Worth.\textsuperscript{26}

In the weeks leading to the November election, the Texas Regulars mounted an elaborately financed anti-Roosevelt campaign with over thirty statewide radio programs and front-page advertisements in newspapers across the state. Their message was broadly anti-labor and anti-government, and openly white supremacist, particularly in light of the recent Supreme Court case \textit{Smith v. Allwright} (1944), which overturned the state’s white primary law. Spearheading the Regulars’ movement in Washington was former governor and current senator W. Lee “Pappy” O’Daniel, who charged that Roosevelt was a greater threat than Adolf Hitler. The Regulars offered a platform that included calls for the “Return of state rights,” and the “Restoration of the supremacy of the white race,” both of which had been destroyed by the “Communist-controlled New Deal.” In spite of being “whipped to a near-frenzy,” the Regulars could not destroy Roosevelt’s popularity among rank and file Texans. The Regulars, therefore, most of who refused to support Dewey, were defeated in November. Roosevelt carried Texas with 72 percent of the vote, while the Regulars gained only 12 percent. More than 100,000 Texas Democrats, however, voted with the Republicans. Hence, the Texas Regular Party enhanced the dichotomy between the New Deal and anti-Roosevelt Democrats. \textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{26} George Norris Green, “Texas Regulars,” \textit{Handbook of Texas Online}, \url{www.tshaonline.org} (accessed Nov. 2, 2011); Armstrong to Texas Delegation, July 8, 1944, file 335, Box 143-5, Armstrong MSS; J.A. “Tiny” Gooch to Fellow Democrats, (no date), file 335, Box 147-24, Armstrong MSS; Burrough, \textit{Big Rich}, 138.

\textsuperscript{27} Burrough, \textit{Big Rich}, 138; Young, “The Democratic Party;” Armstrong to \textit{Dallas Morning News}, Apr. 18, 1944: file 335, Box 144-7, Armstrong MSS; Campbell, \textit{Gone to Texas}, 406-7; T.H. McGregor to Armstrong, Feb. 12, 1945, file 335, Box 147-24, Armstrong MSS; Betty Andujar. Interview with Kristi T.
In light of the fact that anti-New Deal sentiment among Texans was measured around 60 percent in November, a number of other factors contributed to Roosevelt’s victory besides his personal popularity. First, there was a fear that a change of presidents would delay the end of the war; therefore, delaying or endangering the return of a particular soldier, which was the chief interest and consideration of many voters. Second, Texas Regulars were handicapped by lack of time since none had anticipated that the Texas Supreme Court would decide against the Regular elector nominees of the May convention. Third, the Republicans’ program changed so that they fought the Regulars more than they fought the New Dealers. Last, in most places the ballot was not secret and a great many federal office holders, contractors and employees and relatives of both were afraid to not vote Democrat. Still, despite the persistent loyalty of the majority of the state’s voters to the Democratic Party, the widening fissure between the factions indicated that a growing number of Texans were receptive to more conservative politics. Over the next decade, however, the conservative Democrats in Texas faced a twofold challenge: one from increasing liberalism within the national party and another from an emerging group of liberals in their own party at home. Although the resulting factional disputes did not destroy conservative Democratic control in Texas, they opened the door for Texas’s Republican Party to emerge once more following a sixteen year hiatus.28

The first opportunity for Republican reemergence in post-war Texas was the 1948 Democratic senatorial primary, which was one of the most disputed and controversial

Strickland, Sept. 10, 1993, OH 964 (University Archives, Willis Library, University of North Texas, Denton, Texas), 10.

28 T.W. McGregor to Armstrong, (no date), file 335, Box 147-24, Armstrong MSS; Campbell, Gone to Texas, 410; Olien, From Token to Triumph, 64.
elections in Texas history. Once “Pappy” O’Daniel’s Senate term drew to a close in 1948 and he decided to retire, the race to succeed him essentially turned into a two-man contest between former governor Coke Stevenson and Congressman Lyndon B. Johnson.

Stevenson supplemented his well-known views of limited government and taxation with condemnation of American communists, whereas Johnson ran on his record as a New Dealer, but maintained ties with conservatives by condemning the civil rights initiatives of the Harry S. Truman administration, championing the interests of oil companies, and voting for the antiunion Taft-Hartley Act of 1947. Stevenson ran first in the primary with 477,077 votes, but Johnson tallied 405,617 to force a runoff, during which Stevens and Johnson exchanged ferocious blows: the Governor attacked the Congressman as the lackey of the White House liberals, while Johnson referred to Stevenson as a “weary, wobbly, frightened man” who was soft on subversives. Tempers reached a climax, however, after Governor Stevenson’s apparent victory in the run-off was overturned.

Once the Texas Election Board announced that Stevenson had won by 362 votes, amended returns began coming in primarily from counties in South Texas. Box 13 from Alice in Jim Wells County reported 203 uncounted ballots – 202 of them for Johnson. More sinister, poll lists showed that the voters signed their names in alphabetical order and had identical handwriting. Despite questions then and later, Johnson wound up the winner by eighty-seven votes. 29

The free-swinging battle within the Democratic camp during the Stevenson-Johnson contest and Johnson’s tainted victory offered Texas Republicans a reasonable

29 Campbell, Gone to Texas, 413; “Johnson Assails CIO Aid by Coke,” Dallas Times Herald, Aug. 17, 1948; Olien, From Token to Triumph, 101.
chance to win the Senate seat if they could only seize the opportunity. In spite of the Texas party still being under the thumb of national committeeman R.B. Creager, serious challenges to his control steadily mounted. Still, Creager forces saw the United States Senate contest as an opportunity to bolster their own support and defy charges of not wanting to grow the party. Therefore, a search for the right candidate became paramount. Party hopes initially fastened on Senator O’Daniel in spite of his earlier announced plans for retirement. Although O’Daniel considered the offer, he refused just before the Democratic runoff election because he felt sure that Stevenson would capture the 237, 195 votes that conservative candidate George Peddy received in the Democratic primary, thus ensuring Stevenson the victory. Upon O’Daniel’s refusal, the party’s hopes came to rest with Houston oilman H.J. “Jack” Porter.  

Like many Texas oilmen and businessmen, Porter had fallen out of sympathy with the national Democratic Party upon the advent of the New Deal; therefore, he voted for Willkie in 1940 and supported the Texas Regulars in 1944. At the end of World War II, Porter, like most oilmen, urged an end to price controls on petroleum products and opposed the proposed reduction of the oil depletion allowance. More importantly for the Republican Party, however, Porter was a personal friend and political ally of Houston oil tycoon H. Roy Cullen. A fifth-grade dropout, but perhaps the richest man in the United States in his heyday, Cullen had emerged as the ultraconservatives’ standard bearer following the death of Kirby. Both Cullen and Porter had visions of a Republican Party shoved sharply to the right. Hence, Cullen took Porter to Washington in December 1946,
where they met with the new Republican Speaker of the House, Joseph W. Martin of Massachusetts, who replaced Sam Rayburn when the Republicans took Congress that November. Cullen had been courting Martin for years, sponsoring a fund-raiser for him in Houston that fall, and Martin was among the few in Washington who took Cullen seriously. Martin, therefore, encouraged the two in their plans to take over the Texas Republicans. Shortly thereafter, Creager appointed Porter to head a committee seeking a Republican challenger to Johnson’s 1948 senatorial bid. When one could not be found, however, Porter ran himself. 31

For the first time since the 1932 gubernatorial race, a general election in Texas drew considerable popular notice. The Houston Press characterized Porter’s campaign as “slam bang.” To the New York Times, the Republican Party’s fight to regain control of the Senate placed Texas as “the main battleground in the South.” As expected, Cullen publicly endorsed Porter, but the conservative-liberal rift in the Democratic Party deepened when Governor Stevenson, reacting bitterly to his defeat by Johnson, also endorsed Porter. Johnson, however, easily defeated Porter by a vote of 702,785 to 349,665. By championing the interests of independent oil companies, Johnson received cash from Sid Richardson, Clint Murchison, and other oilmen. Still, Porter ran exceedingly well, running ahead of Republican presidential candidate Thomas Dewey in nearly every Texas County, which culminated in an 80,000 vote margin. He also carried two oil-rich cities, Tyler in East Texas and Midland in West Texas, and most of the German counties, nearly won majorities in Dallas and Houston, and attracted about one-

31 Olien, From Token to Triumph, 103-4; Burrough, Big Rich, 19, 206-7.
third of the vote in the Panhandle. Thus, Porter’s success proved once again that a good many conservative Democrats found their candidate unacceptably liberal and that the Republican Party in Texas could become competitive with strong candidates, adequate financing, and aggressive leadership. More importantly, however, because of Cullen’s financial blessing, Porter laid the groundwork for an ultraconservative takeover of the Texas Republican Party.32

Democratic Party divisions in post-war Texas were also facilitated by the Red Scare. Once Truman ascended to the presidency following Roosevelt’s death in April 1945, the Soviet Union continued to extend its influence across Eastern Europe and exploded its first atomic bomb in 1949. Communism’s successes in Europe, together with the loss of China to red forces raised concerns about internal security and the loyalty of American citizens. When Senator Joseph R. McCarthy of Wisconsin plowed into the nation’s consciousness in February 1950 with accusations that the State Department was riddled with Communists, many Texans took heed. Since liberals were most likely to be labeled as communist sympathizers, the liberal-conservative split within the Democratic Party continued to widen. Although the issue of communism first appeared in the 1946 gubernatorial campaign, the firing of University of Texas President Homer P. Rainey in 1944 by the Board of Regents provided the backdrop. Rainey was fired over charges that the school taught communism, had a “nest of homosexuals,” and that Rainey wanted to admit blacks. To avenge himself, Rainey announced for governor in 1946 and garnered

much liberal support by championing academic freedom, labor union rights, and civil rights. Because of his portrayal as a friend of radical labor and an adherent of radical left-wing ideology in the campaign, however, Rainey was easily defeated in the Democratic runoff against conservative candidate Beauford H. Jester, who became governor.  

The concern over communist-infiltrated labor unions took center stage during Jester’s first term. The Congress of Industrial Organization (CIO) organized numerous plants across Texas during 1946-1947, and strikes cost the state’s corporations millions in lost goods and services. Consequently, the Texas Legislature and Governor Jester responded in early 1947 by passing a right-to-work law that prohibited requiring union membership as a condition of employment. Proponents of the law basked in their victory by circulating a poster with photographs of Democratic legislators who had voted against the right-to-work law with the label “Communists in the Texas Legislature.” It was President Truman’s stance on labor and race, however, which concerned conservative Texans most. First, Truman vetoed the antiunion Taft-Hartley Act of 1947. In February 1948, he sent to Congress his “Ten Point Charter of Human Rights,” which called for an end to racial discrimination in federal hiring and to segregation in the armed services and called for an anti-lynching law, elimination of the poll tax as a suffrage requirement, and the creation of a Fair Employment Practices Committee [FEPC], all of which spelled anathema to a racially segregated South. 

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34 Campbell, *Gone to Texas*, 412, 414; Green, *Establishment in Texas Politics*, 108, 113; Rankin to Armstrong, Feb. 6, 1948: file 335, Box 159-7, Armstrong MSS.
It was the issue of Texas’s tidelands, however, which cemented the liberal-conservative split within Texas’s Democratic Party and provided the hot button issue that Texas’s ultraconservative oil chieftains needed to orchestrate another third party movement. Texas’s tidelands, as defined by the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848, extended 10.3 miles into the Gulf of Mexico. Spain had claimed control of the seas out that far, and Mexico did the same. After the Texas Revolution, the Republic also asserted the 10.3 mile limit. When annexed, Texas’s claim received federal recognition, and then was confirmed by the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, which ended the Mexican War. Thus, in 1947, when six Supreme Court justices denied California’s claim to ownership of its own oil-rich tidelands, Texas officials reacted vehemently in opposition. Governor Jester, Land Commissioner Bascom Giles, and Attorney General Price Daniel condemned the decision. Daniel claimed the decision against California represented the “greatest blow . . . against . . . property rights of a state since the Civil War,” whereas Giles went so far as to suggest that Texas secede from the Union. It was Texas’s oilmen, however, who obviously stood to lose the most if they were denied drilling rights in the tidelands along the Gulf coast. Hence, Texas’s leading oilmen took up the states’ rights battle-cry because of their desire to exploit the oil-rich land off the Texas and Louisiana coast.35

Because of Truman’s opposition to state ownership of the tidelands, the zealous oil crowd that dominated the old Texas Regular faction talked of forming another third-party if Truman received the Democratic presidential nomination. Governor Jester,

35 Ricky F. Dobbs, Yellow Dogs and Republicans: Allan Shivers and Texas Two-Party Politics (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2005), 59, 60, 78; Campbell, Gone to Texas, 414; Green, Establishment in Texas Politics, 108.
however, opposed the idea and argued for remaining loyal and fighting Truman from within the party. After being easily defeated by Regular forces at the Brownwood state convention in May 1948, loyalist Democrats attempted a comeback, just as they had in 1944, to capture the second Democratic state convention in September. Since Truman won the Democratic Party’s nomination in June, however, and Governor Jester would not abandon the party, most Texas Democrats saw no choice except to join the loyalists in staffing the State Democratic Executive Committee (SDEC) with loyal Democrats and ousting those electors selected in May who had Texas Regular proclivities. Consequently, anti-Truman Democrats marched out of the Fort Worth convention in September under the banner of “Dixiecrats” and joined four Deep South states in throwing their support behind South Carolina Governor Strom Thurmond for the presidency. Texas “Dixiecrat” Secretary Austin Hancock described the September state convention as a “carpet-baggers Convention” where “Negroes, Pinks, Reds, Communist-minded and New Dealers, including Left Wingers” took over.36

The “Dixiecrats” or States’ Rights Democratic Party was conceived after the Democratic national convention placed a strong civil rights plank in its platform. Strongly opposed to the civil rights plank, delegates from Mississippi and Alabama stormed out of the convention and joined delegates from Louisiana and South Carolina to form the new party. Because race was not the burning issue in Texas that it was in the Deep South states, Texas’s delegation to the national convention remained loyal to Truman. While the “Dixiecrat” candidate Thurmond garnered only 6.7 percent of Texas’s

vote, he carried Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina and Alabama overwhelmingly. Texans contributed to Truman’s upset win over Republican presidential candidate Thomas E. Dewey by casting 750,700 votes for the incumbent. Still, Truman’s victory in Texas owed more to tradition and the lack of viable opponents than to support for his policies. Hence, when the Truman administration sued Texas on December 21, 1948 for federal ownership of its tidelands, it became clear to Texas officials and leading ultraconservatives that the philosophies of the northern and southern wings of the national Democratic Party were at such a variance that they could not be reconciled. To Texas’s ultraconservatives, Truman and the extreme left could no more be appeased than could Japan, Moscow, or Berlin. Thus, as the national Democratic Party continued to veer left, the fight over the tidelands exacerbated the looming split within Texas’s party, thus opening the door for any viable Republican candidates. 37

According to noted political historian and West Texas native V.O. Key, the author of the most original book on Texas politics, after the 1948 election the state had developed the bitterest “intra-Democratic fight along New Deal and anti-New Deal lines in the South,” but with only one viable party, there was no other place to go. Following the death of Governor Jester in July of 1949, however, things changed as Lieutenant Governor Allan Shivers became the state’s new chief executive. Once the United States Supreme Court handed down its 1950 ruling in favor of the federal government’s

37 Campbell, Gone to Texas, 414-415; Green, Establishment in Texas Politics, 109; Kingston, Attlesey and Crawford, Texas Almanac’s Political History of Texas, 87; Dobbs, Yellow Dogs and Republicans., 60-61; Judge Merritt Gibson to Armstrong, Feb. 26, 1948, file 335, Box 157-13, Armstrong MSS; George Armstrong to Walter F. George (U.S. Senator), Jan. 28, 1946, file 335, Box 154-14, Armstrong MSS.
ownership of the tidelands, Shiver’s own qualms toward the Truman administration and national party easily coalesced with public opinion, which clearly showed the tidelands issue headed its list of grievances. The 1950 ruling prompted two hundred citizens of Nocona to demand Texas’s secession while railroad commissioner Ernest Thompson and Congressman Lloyd Bentsen Jr. called upon Texas to exercise its unique right of dividing into five states (with ten senators committed to state ownership of the tidelands). Even more deeply pitted against the Supreme Court’s ruling were the newly rich oilmen whose wealth essentially controlled the politics of the state. More importantly, however, the Supreme Court’s ruling provided Governor Shivers with an issue of such magnitude that it could be exploited in the 1952 election. But first, he had to be elected governor of Texas in his own right.\textsuperscript{38}

Shivers easily won the governorship in 1950, and it became clear that his approach to state government resembled that of his predecessor. Yet unlike his predecessor, Shivers’ loyalty was not bound to the Democratic Party, particularly after Truman came out in support of civil rights and vetoed a bill in 1952 that would have guaranteed Texas ownership of its tidelands. Hence, the presidential election that fall gave the governor a chance to respond, but first he had to face liberal challenger Ralph Yarborough for his own office. Like Shivers, Yarborough graduated from the University of Texas law school and served in World War II. He also served as state assistant attorney general before being elected district judge of Travis County in 1936. Although Yarborough called him a “liberal-conservative,” he was known as a supporter of the

Truman administration’s efforts to continue the New Deal and would eventually become the most important liberal Democrat in the state. 39

Mirroring the Shivers-Yarborough contest was another liberal-conservative matchup between Congressman Lindley G. Beckworth of Gladewater and Price Daniel to replace Tom Connally, who retired from the United States Senate after twenty-four years in office. Daniel, who served as attorney general from 1946 to 1952, helped lead the defense of Texas’s claim to the tidelands while accusing the Truman administration of extravagant spending, corruption, and socialism. Beckworth, on the other hand, had a record of cooperation with the national Democratic Party. In the Democratic primary, Shivers and Daniel teamed up to run a conservative campaign in opposition to “Trumanism,” the “mess in Washington,” and the “Tidelands steal.” Consequently, on July 26, 1952, both won convincing victories, although Yarborough gained nearly half a million votes in defeat. 40

By the November election, however, a much different political scenario had developed because Jack Porter had made significant strides in his attempt to help build the state’s Republican Party while attempting to wrest control away from South Texas political boss Creager. After Democratic Congressman Eugene Worley of Shamrock resigned his seat in February, 1950, to accept a federal judicial position, Porter saw an opportunity, especially in light of Truman’s position on the tidelands and his recent veto of the Kerr Natural Gas Bill, which opposed federal regulation of natural gas.


40 Campbell, Gone to Texas, 415-16; Dobbs, Yellow Dogs and Republicans, 60; Kingston, Attlesey, and Mary G. Crawford, Texas Almanac’s Political History of Texas, 137.
Consequently, Porter became the chief financial supporter of Republican candidate Ben Guill of Pampa, who decided to run in the May 6 special election to fill Worley’s seat. Porter also mustered support from numerous independent oil operators throughout the state, which resulted in much newspaper and radio exposure. In spite of receiving no support from Creager or the Republican Congressional Campaign Committee, Guill won the seat against six Democrats who divided the majority party’s vote. Although Guill lost in the November election, he was the first Republican to sit in Congress for Texas in twenty years. More important to the political fortunes of Texas’s Republican Party, on October 28, 1950 Republican National Committeeman Creager died. 41

Although Porter was defeated in November by Henry Zweifel in the contest to replace Creager, he got another chance in 1952 when the Republican National Convention elected a committeeman for Texas for a four-year term. Fortunately for Porter, his bitter rematch with Zweifel coincided with a much more significant political matchup: that of Senator Robert A. Taft and General Dwight D. Eisenhower for the Republican presidential nomination. Eisenhower’s presidency of Columbia University in 1949 first allowed him a shadow campaign in the form of the American Assembly program, which was designed to bring businessmen, politicians, and intellectuals together for discussions of national problems and programs. Traveling across America, Eisenhower waged a successful fund-raising campaign while making useful political contacts. In Texas, he met with Sid W. Richardson, Hugh Roy Cullen, Marrs McClean,

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John H. Blaffer, and other prominent oilmen who were encouraged by Eisenhower’s pledge to support Texas’s ownership of its tidelands and the oil depletion allowance. It was Richardson, however, who went the extra mile to see that Eisenhower became a candidate. In November 1952, Richardson and George Allen, one of the general’s closest friends, boarded the Queen Mary to confront Eisenhower personally in Paris. Richardson carried with him two letters for Eisenhower, one from Dallas oilman Clint Murchison, the other from evangelist Billy Graham. Later in February, Eisenhower declared his candidacy. 42

For Porter, Eisenhower’s candidacy was exactly what he needed for his own political purposes. With the Texas Republican organization still firmly in the hands of the pro-Taft old guard, Porter needed a candidate who would carry him into power. Thus, Porter gained control of the Eisenhower movement among Texas Republicans by assuming the leading role in Eisenhower’s shadow campaign. Raising funds from all corners of Texas and funneling contributions to Columbia University, Porter became the key player in Texas for the American Assembly project. Consequently, Porter’s efforts earned him public recognition as the leader of the pro-Eisenhower forces in the state. Moreover, Porter and party veteran Alvin Lane, with the financial support of ultraconservative oilmen, began planning a grass roots campaign for control of the Republican Party and found a valuable ally in the press. For instance, as early as January 12, 1952, the Dallas Morning News, which was usually the voice of the state’s conservative Democratic faction, published a front-page editorial asking Senator Taft to

42 Olien, From Token to Triumph, 111-13; Burrough, Big Rich, 218-19.
withdraw his candidacy in favor of General Eisenhower. This surprising development was reported in the *New York Times* the following day, thus becoming the first element of the Texas campaign to be reported in the national press.\(^{43}\)

Texas became even more of a hotbed for the national press when Taft forces resorted to political chicanery to gain control of the Republican state convention in Mineral Wells during July. In what came to be known as “the Texas steal,” Eisenhower Republicans suddenly had an issue they could exploit all the way to the White House. Fortunately for Porter and the Eisenhower forces, leading newspapers and magazines in America witnessed the chicanery and rallied to their cause. The *Dallas Morning News* told Senator Taft that his delegation was “nothing short of fraudulent.” In what would become a one-sided press war, the Eisenhower forces were led by Paul G. Hoffman and Oveta Culp Hobby; the latter was the former head of the Women’s Army Corps (WAC) and the wife of former Governor William P. Hobby, publisher of the *Houston Post*. She used widespread contacts in the Texas and national press to stimulate interest and coverage while Hoffman persuaded both *Time* and *Life* magazines and the *New York Times* to send crews to report on Texas politics. Thus, by the time the Republicans met in Chicago in July for their national convention, “the Texas Steal” had come to dominate headlines. By that time, even Taft forces began to realize they were on the wrong side of a moral issue as the Eisenhower delegates were eventually seated. When contested delegations from Louisiana, Georgia, and Minnesota were also awarded to Eisenhower, it

put him over the top, but perhaps as importantly, Porter finally found his place in the sun as Texas’s national committeeman for the Republican Party.  

Governor Shivers, meanwhile, laden with a sense that the national Democratic Party and the Texas Democratic Party were “two separate entities,” led his own revolt against the national party. Addressing the SDEC in New Braunfels in April 1952, Shivers blasted the Truman administration. First and foremost, Shivers had called for a tidelands state-ownership plank in the national platform, but he also demanded that civil rights and fair employment initiatives be replaced by efforts at “harmony and brotherhood, and that the “tentacles of creeping socialism,” be stopped. Where the Jeffersonian Democrats, the Texas Regulars, and Dixiecrats had failed, however, Shivers stood poised to succeed. At the state Democratic convention in May, Shivers and his Dixiecrat allies gained control and appointed an uninstructed delegation to the national convention in July. Emphatically opposed, Loyalist forces, led by Maury Maverick, bolted the convention and some engaged in a “shove, tussle, or a fist fight” on their way out. The fact that many former New and Fair Dealers remained seated, however, revealed that the moderate elements, former allies of the Loyalist-liberal wing, were now in concert with the conservatives mainly because of the tidelands issue. Maverick dubbed this new Democratic coalition “Shivercrats,” and the name stuck. 


Governor Shivers’ stance toward the national party hardened once the Democratic national convention nominated liberal Illinois governor Adlai Stevenson as their official standard bearer in July. Because Stevenson would not guarantee Texas ownership of the tidelands, Shivers refused to support him and then orchestrated an endorsement of the Republican nominee Eisenhower at the second state Democratic convention in Amarillo that fall, where, according to an elected official, the airport was “choked with oil company planes.” Thus, for the first time in Texas history, the state Democratic Party, although it reluctantly put Stevenson on the ballot, officially supported a Republican candidate for the presidency. To clarify their position even further, every Democratic nominee for state office except one took advantage of a 1951 state law that allowed one party’s candidates to cross-file as candidates of another, therefore putting their names on the ballot as Republicans also. This meant that Shivers and Daniel had no opponents in the November general election (Shivers, for example, received 1,375,547 votes as a Democrat and 468,139 as a Republican) and could devote their full efforts for carrying the state for Eisenhower. Reflecting upon these “unprecedented” events, Shivers remarked, “I spent a lot of sleepless nights.”

Texas oilmen saw to it that the tidelands issue dominated the 1952 election. Since royalties from Texas state lands were used to support the public schools, the children of Texas were pitted as the true victims of federal control. With the financial support of millionaire oilmen, such as Palmer Bradley and Clint Murchison, the public relations firm

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46 Dobbs, Yellow Dogs and Republicans, 89-90; Campbell, Gone to Texas, 416-17; Green, Establishment in Texas Politics, 146; Shivers, “Oral Interview with Fred Gantt,” OH 26, Oct. 2, 13, 14; Kingston, Attlesey, and Crawford, Political History of Texas, 299.
of Watson Associates created and distributed six hundred thousand copies of an anti-Stevenson newspaper called the *Native Texan*. One issue featured an evil-looking Adlai Stevenson sneering at a classroom of Texas children and saying, “Tideland funds for those kids? Aw, let them pick cotton.” The *Native Texan* was mailed exclusively to rural Texas communities. Believing that most Texas farmers were anti-Negro on the equality issue, Murchison told a reporter, “My paper kind of catered to these feelings.” The *Dallas Morning News* coined the slogan, “Don’t let them take it away,” and asked, “Can our constitutional rights and the Eighth Commandment be changed according to the machinations of the Northerners, so-called Democrats?” Separating the state Democratic leadership from the national party in the public’s mind was “central to the 1952 campaign.” 47

During September, the campaign gained more momentum as the “Shivercrats” and Eisenhower Republicans welded their forces into what was a blending of Republican economic conservatism and southern racial and states’ rights worries. On September 16, “Shivercrats” organized a state campaign in Austin to carry the state for Eisenhower under the banner of “Texas Democrats for Eisenhower,” an unofficial campaign agency, and promoted a drive into every Texas precinct to defeat Stevenson. Moreover, the Shivercrat defection left the remnants of Texas’s Democratic Party in alarming disarray. Because there was no statutory requirement for party registration in Texas, it was impossible to determine precisely how many Democrats became “Shivercrats,” but an overwhelming 73 percent who “liked Ike” claimed to be Democrats. Thus, on November 47

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4, Eisenhower defeated Stevenson nationwide while tallying 1,102,879 votes in Texas to Stevenson’s 969,228. Urbanization was also a determining factor in Eisenhower’s Texas victory; he received 71 percent of the vote in Midland, 65 percent in Brownsville, 63 percent in Dallas, 62 percent in Amarillo, 61 percent in Odessa, 58 percent in El Paso, Fort Worth, Houston, and Lubbock, and 56 percent in Tyler and San Antonio. The only major urban centers he failed to carry were Wichita Falls, Waco, Corpus Christi, Beaumont, and Galveston. Because of the urban vote gains, Eisenhower not only won Texas, but Florida, Tennessee, and Virginia as well. Soon after taking office, Eisenhower signed a bill guaranteeing state ownership of the tidelands to their historic limits, which guaranteed significant revenue for Texas, but even more benefits for oil companies. 48

Not since 1928 had a Republican presidential candidate won Texas and the nation, but once again, not without the help of the Democrats. Yet unlike Hoover, Eisenhower would win Texas and a second term four years later. Hence, by 1952, a much different political dynamic had arisen to foster the rise of Texas’s Republican Party. Whereas prohibition had been the chief ingredient for Republican growth until 1932, Eisenhower’s victory twenty years later marked the culmination of an effort by Texas Democracy’s most conservative elements to gain control of the state Democratic Party in order to reverse liberal reform measures of the Roosevelt and Truman administrations. Big government, federal regulation of state agencies, civil rights, labor unions and communism were all issues that undermined the traditional values and beliefs of

48 Dobbs, Yellow Dogs and Republicans, 91-94; “Shivers Democrats Map State Fight to Elect General,” Austin American, Sept. 17, 1952; Kingston, Attesley, and Crawford, Texas Almanac’s Political History of Texas, 94; Olien, From Token to Triumph, 138; Campbell, Gone to Texas, 417.
conservative Texans. Thus, when President Truman sued Texas for ownership of its tidelands in December of 1948, the final dye was cast, convincing those Democrats who had remained loyal for so many years that it was time to become “presidential Republicans.” Because of the role that Democratic stalwart Allen Shivers played in getting Eisenhower elected, “suddenly it wasn’t sinful or socially unacceptable to be a Republican.”

The tidelands issue not only provoked tens of thousands of Democratic states’ rights adherents to vote Republican, but it also confirmed that Texas oil was the driving economic force behind the rise of the Republican Party in Texas. Although Roy Cullen proved to be the first chief benefactor for Texas Republicans by helping bankroll the efforts of Jack Porter, other ultraconservative oil chieftains climbed aboard once they realized the National Democratic Party’s policies were no longer akin to their economic interests. Once Eisenhower announced his candidacy, H.L. Hunt, Sid Richardson, and Clint Murchison joined Cullen in becoming major contributors to the Republican Party. In *The Establishment in Texas Politics* George Norris Green points out that because of the magnitude of the tidelands issue and the prospects of an Eisenhower victory in 1951, Texas oilmen were “no longer afraid of switching from Democrats to Republicans.” Thus, as the national Democratic Party was reshaped by the liberal policies of the Roosevelt and Truman administrations, many conservative Texas Democrats, seeing the impact this was having upon their own party, began voting Republican. Together with the

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rise of Texas oil and urbanization, it was the right formula for the beginning of Republican ascendancy in Texas. 50

CHAPTER 3

THE BIG BREAKTHROUGH

As encouraging as Eisenhower’s successive presidential victories were for Texas Republicans, there were still no Republicans serving in Texas’s 181-member legislature as late as November 1961. Eisenhower’s successes, however, together with the growing divisions within Texas’s Democratic Party set the wheels in motion for what over the next decade would be considered major milestones for Texas’s Republican Party. The first of these was the election of Dallas real estate salesman Bruce Alger in 1954 to the Fifth Congressional District, which made him the first full term Republican congressman to represent Texas since Harry Wurzbach’s final campaign in the 1930s. The second, but most spectacular, was the election of Midwestern State University political science professor John G. Tower to the United States Senate in 1961. In a special election, Tower defeated Democrat William “Bill” Blakely to become the first Republican Senator from Texas since the Reconstruction era.¹

While riding the coattails from Eisenhower’s victories, Texas Republicans continued to exploit the growing liberal-conservative split within the state Democratic Party. In the 1954 Democratic primary for a congressional seat in Dallas, a runoff was forced between liberal candidate Leslie Hackler and conservative Wallace Savage. When Savage won the runoff, however, it set the stage for thirty-six year old Republican

candidate Bruce Alger to secure an upset victory over a veteran Democratic politician who had been a former Dallas mayor. In the November election, Hackler’s supporters rejected the candidacy of a conservative by either staying home and not voting at all or casting a protest vote for Alger. Once the election returns were in, it became clear that “legions of ladies” in North Dallas and alienated liberals in South and East Dallas had coalesced to help bring Alger the victory. Local newspapers observed that a great deal of the former Eisenhower vote in North Dallas and the Park Cities went for Alger, who also won in a number of usually strong Democratic liberal precincts. Also revealing was the effort of Roy Evans, then president of the United Automobile Workers local in Dallas, who helped lead the anti-Savage drive for which he drew criticism. Yet Evans’s thinking reflected that of many other liberal Democrats that working for a two-party system was preferable to constantly being co-opted by the ruling conservative Democrats. Hence, Alger’s victory not only revealed that Dallas was the conservative capitol of Texas, but that the liberal wing of Texas’s Democratic Party was becoming formidable.¹

The Democratic gubernatorial primary that same year also revealed the growing strength of the liberal forces. Although Governor Shivers ended up winning the primary against Liberal candidate Ralph Yarborough, it was not without a runoff in which Yarborough finished with 47 percent of the vote. In spite of Shivers linking Yarborough with the recently handed down Supreme Court Case Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954), which called for an end to the segregation of public schools and angered

many white Texans, Yarborough still managed to force a runoff. Yarborough lost once
again in 1956 when he ran for governor against United States Senator Price Daniel, who
decided to run for governor following Shivers’ announcement to retire. Although Daniels
resorted to calling Yarborough a “nigger lover” during the campaign, Yarborough still
managed to force a runoff and garnered 694,830 votes to the conservative Daniel’s
698,001. Yarborough and his liberal followers believed they had a chance of winning the
upcoming special election to fill the Senate seat vacated by Daniel. That chance increased
significantly when Governor Shivers delayed scheduling the special election for the
remainder of his tenure in office because he believed that William “Bill” Blakely, the
conservative whom he appointed to fill Daniel’s unexpired term, could not fend off the
strong Republican candidate, Thad Hutcheson. Shivers also believed that Hutcheson
could defeat Yarborough, the liberal candidate, because he would draw a number of
conservative Democrats. Hence, not until the Democrats had time to recruit a respectable
conservative candidate, Martin Dies, did Governor Daniel set April 2, 1957, as the date
for the special election. Ironically, Hutcheson and Dies ended up splitting the
conservative vote, allowing Yarborough to win the senate seat without a majority since a
special election would not require a runoff. ²

Although Alger’s victory was the only significant Republican gain, Yarborough’s
strong showing in the Democratic congressional and gubernatorial primaries and his
election to the Senate catered to the Republican hope that the increasing liberal strength

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² Green, Establishment in Texas Politics, 152-56; Olien, From Token to Triumph, 146-49;
Randolph B. Campbell, Gone to Texas: A History of the Lone Star State (New York: Oxford University
Press, 2003), 426.
of the Democratic Party would push more conservative Democrats into Texas’s GOP. Moreover, Eisenhower’s ensuing reelection continued to give Texas Republicans hope that their dream of a two-party state was possible. As momentous as these elections were for Republicans, however, they were quickly subdued. First, on February 17, 1956, President Eisenhower announced that because of the “questionable aura” and “arrogant” behavior that surrounded the passing of the Harris-Fulbright Natural Gas Bill, he would veto it. The bill, if not vetoed, would have increased natural gas prices between two hundred million and four hundred million dollars a year, an increase that would have boosted the value of southwestern gas reserves between twelve billion and thirty billion dollars. Hence, in the worst reversal Texas oil had sustained, the Republican Party had suddenly lost millions in oil-industry donations, which was vital to developing candidates and running campaigns. Furthermore, by 1958 the competition from Middle Eastern oil was slowly strangling the industry, causing the Texas Railroad Commission to limit Texas’s production so that by 1962 Texas wells could operate only seven days per month, further reducing potential Republican support.  

Eisenhower also hurt the Republican cause in Texas by appointing only Texas Democrats to cabinet positions, thus denying them the expected prize of patronage. For instance, he appointed Robert Anderson as Secretary of the Navy, Oveta Culp Hobby as Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, and Dillon Anderson as a consultant to the National Security Council. Lower level administration positions were also filled by Texas Democrats. Thus, for Eisenhower, continued loyalty to Governor Shivers and the

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“Shivercrats” was more important than helping Jack Porter grow the Republican Party since Eisenhower still needed the “Shivercrats” votes to win in 1956. The influence of congressional Democrats also accounted for the Eisenhower administration’s preference for Texas Democrats. Sam Rayburn and Lyndon Johnson loomed far larger in their calculations than Jack Porter and all his friends. Knowing, therefore, that federal appointments at subcabinet levels were needed for the development and cultivation of political talent, how could Jack Porter and other party leaders convince influential state conservatives that the Republican Party in Texas was legitimate when appointments and favors were awarded to Texas Democrats? To add insult to injury for Texas Republicans, Eisenhower supported progressive programs in health, education, and civil rights, thus moving him nearer liberal positions which party conservatives, including the anti-New Deal Republicans strongly opposed. Beginning in 1956, however, conservatives found their spokesman in John G. Tower, a Midwestern State University Political Science professor, who led the charge against Eisenhower’s “Modern Republicanism.”

By June 1960, the ideological split between the White House and the conservative Texas Republicans was complete. The state party’s platform represented a repudiation of “Modern Republicanism” and thus of both Eisenhower and the eastern leadership of the party. But even more significant changes were afoot. By the 1960s, for the first time since the Civil War, more people had begun moving into the South than moving away, and by 1980, one out of every five southerners had been born in the North. This migration facilitated urbanization, which was beginning to noticeably impact voting patterns in the

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4 Olien, *From Token to Triumph*, 153, 158, 165-67.
South, as witnessed in Eisenhower’s wins. This urbanization of the South was not based on heavy industry as it was in the North. Rather, southern urbanization was oriented toward light, highly skilled industries and services, which spawned significant increases in the white collar rather than the blue collar population. Moreover, as the white collar populations continued to increase, post World War II urbanization was no longer subservient to agricultural and rural interests. Thus, the rural character of the state’s main political concerns began to be overshadowed by those of crowded cities. More importantly, the steady increases in southern cities’ white collar population produced a large middle class, which according to Leonard Reissman, noted author on urban growth in the South, was typically the “initiator and instigator” for social changes in its own behalf. Thus, the growing middle class, continued urbanization, and the arrival of non-Southerners all led to new opportunities for the Republican Party, even as it drifted away from Eisenhower.

By 1960, primarily because of the manufacturing boom in oil refining, chemicals production, and electronics, growth had become the watchword for cities in Texas. Fortunately for the Republican Party, the continued growth of Texas’s cities could not only be attributed to rural Texans moving into the city, but also to those from the Midwest and Northeast regions of the county who were looking for new opportunity. A 1963 study indicated that 56 percent of Dallas’s increase in population between 1950 and 1960 came from in-migration. The northern migrants, however, did not share the

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common southern consciousness and historic identity to the Democratic Party of most Texans, so voting Republican was not uncommon for them. Against this backdrop of Texas’s growing urban population and the growing liberal-conservative divide within the state’s Democratic Party, and despite the ideological split between Texas’s GOP and the White House, the conditions were ripe for the Texas Republicans to score a major breakthrough. Thus, when Senator Lyndon B. Johnson of Texas announced that he would seek the Democratic nomination for president in 1960, the outlook became even brighter. Ever since Johnson’s fraudulent victory in the 1948 Democratic Party primary election, he had become a despised name among many of Texas’s conservative voters. The ill will generated by Johnson was revived in 1959 after Democrat hopeful John F. Kennedy launched his presidential bid. Johnson, who had then become Texas’s powerful Senate majority leader, would eventually challenge Kennedy for the Democratic nomination, but he would also be up for reelection to the Senate in 1960, and did not want to risk giving up the Senate seat should his presidential plans not materialize. Never one to miss out on using his political power, Johnson pressured the Texas legislature to pass what came to be known as the Johnson Act, which permitted him to run for reelection to the Senate and seek the presidency simultaneously. ⁶

Texas Republicans, meanwhile, needing someone to run against Johnson in the senate race, turned to Professor Tower, the articulate spokesman of their party’s dominant conservatism. However, when State GOP Chairman Thad Hutcheson asked Tower by

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phone to accept the nomination, Tower, realizing his chances would be next to impossible, replied, “Can’t you find somebody else?” to which Hutcheson replied, “Nobody else we want will take it.” Thus, whether by fortune or default, Tower became the Republicans’ candidate. His campaign began by immediately maligning Johnson for keeping a foot in both races and having posters made which read, “Double your pleasure; double your fun – scratch Lyndon twice!” (Vote once against Lyndon by voting for Richard M. Nixon for president; vote a second time against Lyndon by voting for Tower.)

Tower’s candidacy received another boost when Johnson’s campaign ran a fraudulent full-page advertisement in the *Dallas Times Herald* in November which listed thirty-five hundred prominent local residents as Johnson supporters. Consequently, the newspaper was flooded by complaints from indignant Dallas citizens who claimed that their names had been used without their knowledge; and, indeed a spot check of several hundred alleged signers not only disclosed that a large proportion of them had not consented to the use of their names, but also many were no longer living. Hence, in the opinion of indignant Republicans and many conservative Democrats, “Landslide Lyndon,” the master of the slow count and the rigger of elections, was up to his dirty old tricks and some sort of protest needed to be staged in Dallas, the state’s hotbed for Republican sentiment.7

Johnson’s scheduled midday appearance at the Adolphus Hotel during the first week of November provided the ideal occasion. As Johnson and his wife “Lady Bird” arrived, they were met by several hundred red-jacketed women, area members of the

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Texas Federation of Republican Women (TFRW) who displayed banners that read, “Texas Tombstones for Lyndon” and “Scratch Lyndon Twice.” The women were joined by men, other women, and teenagers who poked the derisive banners into the Johnson’s faces and shoved the Johnson entourage, who took nearly thirty minutes to make their way through the hotel lobby and into the grand ballroom. Awaiting Johnson in the lobby was Tower, who hoped to egg Johnson into a spontaneous public debate; however, Johnson smiled cunningly at Tower and turned away. Commenting upon the near riotous scene the following Saturday in a statewide television speech from Houston, Johnson told viewers that he and his wife were “hissed at and spit upon” in a mob scene that resembled some other country, and found it “hard to believe” that it was happening in Dallas, Texas. In a typical Johnson manner, however, the Senator skillfully diverted focus from the cause of the riotous scene to the scene itself by stating, “God forgive them for they know not what they do.” 8

Although Johnson’s loyal supporters went along with his shrewd manipulation in running simultaneously for two offices, thousands of Texans who otherwise would have voted for him, protested by voting for Tower, who managed to garner 41.1 percent of the vote. This was an astounding number of votes for Tower since the highest previous percentage that a Republican candidate in a comparable race ever obtained was 25.1 percent (Thad Hutcheson in the Senate race of 1957). Again, the returns from the cities were especially favorable. Midland gave Tower 58 percent of the vote, Dallas 57 percent, 8

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Tyler 51 percent, Houston 49 percent, Odessa, slightly more than 50 percent, Lubbock 46 percent, Amarillo 49 percent, and Fort Worth 44 percent. In rural East Texas Tower carried a number of counties, including Rusk, where he won 55 percent of the vote. Among the state’s urban areas, only strong union cities, Galveston and Beaumont, which Nixon also lost on the presidential ballot, gave Tower a showing below his statewide average. Tower’s strong showing easily proved that he was the best known potential candidate in Texas’s Republican Party. Hence, after Kennedy secured the Democratic presidential nomination and Lyndon Johnson became his vice-presidential running mate, there was little question that Tower would receive the party’s endorsement in the upcoming special election to fill the vacated senatorial office.9

The special election was scheduled for April 4, 1961. Because it was a special election, however, incumbent office holders were not required to resign their positions in order to run. This, in effect, worked to Tower’s advantage as a total of seventy-one names appeared on the ballot for the first round. Although only “six serious” candidates, including Tower, emerged from the seventy-one, the other sixty-five helped the serious six divide the electoral pie into extra thin slices. Among the six serious candidates were elected officeholders State Senator Henry B. Gonzalez of San Antonio, Attorney General Will Wilson, and Congressman Jim Wright of Fort Worth. Both Wright and Wilson championed themselves as true moderates. Gonzalez, the only candidate to fully support Kennedy’s ‘New Frontier’ domestic program, had hoped to be the lightning rod for the growing liberal base across the state, but he ended up dividing that support with former

9 Knaggs, Two-Party Texas, 4; “The Texas Tower Victory,” Human Events 18 (June 9, 1961), 3; Olien, From Token to Triumph, 174.
well-known state legislator Maury Maverick, Jr. William “Bill” Blakely, the fifth Democrat among the six serious candidates, was the conservative frontrunner since he had been appointed by Governor Price Daniel to fill Johnson’s vacated seat during the interim. The sixth serious candidate, of course, was Tower, the lone Republican. Tower painted himself as the only true conservative in the race since Blakley had backed the Kennedy-Johnson presidential ticket in November and voted almost unanimously with liberals while filling Daniel’s vacated Senate seat in 1957. Tower also distinguished his philosophical conservatism from that of the special interests. Moreover, if none of these candidates received a majority of votes in the special election, a runoff would now be held between the top two vote getters, unlike 1957 when Yarborough was elected to the Senate without a majority of the vote. Republicans, still relishing Tower’s showing in the general election, knew that forcing a runoff was very possible.  

Tower’s campaign also benefited from the presidential nomination of Kennedy, whose “New Frontier” further polarized Texas’s Democratic Party because of its perceived move toward socialism. Kennedy’s nomination also marked only the second time for a Catholic to receive the presidential nomination of a major party, the first being Al Smith in 1928. Since Texas was still dominated by Protestant religious traditionalism in 1960, the nomination of a Catholic for president posed another problem for many Texans. Reverend W.A. Criswell, the famed minister of the First Baptist Church of Dallas, expressed the views of many Texans when he asserted in a sermon that “the

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10 Knaggs, Two-Party Texas, 8; “Texans to Ballot in Senate Election,” Dallas Morning News, Apr. 4, 1961; “Republican Tower Says He’s Ahead His Case: Consistent Conservatism,” The Texas Observer, Feb. 11, 1961; Olien, From Token to Triumph, 174-75.
election of a Catholic as President would mean the end of religious liberty in America.”

Johnson’s decision to become Kennedy’s running mate further complicated matters since Johnson, who held the moderate center of Texas Democrats together, wholeheartedly embraced a platform which was heavily weighted against Southern conservative views on civil rights and labor legislation. As one Texas delegate stated following Kennedy’s nomination, “They crammed a civil rights plank down our throats, a liberal for president, then asked to help sell the deal to the South with Johnson’s aid.” Knowing, therefore, that Johnson had lost his hold on the Senate, there was considerable mistrust brewing against him because “he had sold out to the Kennedys” when he accepted second place on the ticket. 11

Conservative Democrats in Texas were especially concerned over Kennedy’s “New Frontier” domestic agenda, particularly an item in the 1960 Democratic National Platform which called for the repeal of Section 14-b of the Taft-Hartley Act, the legislation under which Texas had enacted its right-to-work law in 1947. The right-to-work law provided that a person could not be required to join a labor union in order to get or hold a job. Texas’s business and industrial community held this in the highest esteem because it prevented compulsory unionism as practiced in most Eastern and Midwestern states. Although a repeal of Section 14-b did not seem imminent at the time, the mere fact that it had been proposed caused many conservative Democrats in the Texas legislature to

wonder how long they could maintain party loyalty since they drew so much of their support from the business and industrial community. Consequently, all of these factors causing divisiveness within Texas’s Democratic Party signaled that deep conflicts between their candidates for the United States Senate seat were inevitable. Thus, on April 4, Tower led the field with 321,556 votes, or 31.5 percent. Bill Blakely was second with 186,493, or 18.3 percent, Jim Wright was third with 165,147, or 16.4 percent, Will Wilson was fourth with 118,349, or 11.8 percent, Maverick was fifth with 102,953, or 10.2 percent, and Gonzalez polled sixth with 95,735, or 9.3 percent, while the balance was scattered among the other sixty-five candidates. Representing over half of the approximately one million votes cast, Blakley and Tower’s collective total clearly showed that Texas was still a predominantly conservative state. 12

Although Tower led all candidates with 31.5 percent of the vote, it was far from a majority, which meant that the state’s Democrats were left to choose in a runoff between the two most conservative candidates, Tower and second place finisher Blakely. Quite obviously, a united Democratic Party would easily defeat Tower in the runoff; however, many conservative Democrats were still smarting over Johnson’s shenanigans while upstart liberals saw their runoff choices as between “Tweedledum and Tweedledee.” Moreover, liberals had a number of grudges against Blakely, beginning in 1958 when he tried to unseat the newly elected Yarborough. Blakely also drew the liberals’ ire by backing Eisenhower in two consecutive elections and fighting many of Kennedy’s “New

12 Knaggs, Two-Party Texas, 9; Democratic National Committee to Vice-President Lyndon Johnson, June 27, 1961: Vice-Presidential file, 1961-1963, Box 88, Papers of Lyndon Baynes Johnson (Manuscripts Division, Lyndon Baynes Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas) hereafter cited as Johnson MSS.
Frontier” programs, particularly federal aid to education along with social security and medical care. Furthermore, Blakely fought the confirmation of Robert C. Weaver, a Black whom Kennedy had appointed to head the Housing and Home Finance Agency. Hence, it came as no surprise when several liberal leaders predicted that many of their faction would stay at home on runoff election day. One of its leaders, Mrs. R.D. “Frankie” Randolph of Houston, former Texas Democratic National Committeewoman and a “weathervane” in liberal politics, viewed the upcoming election in terms of it possibly opening the door for Texas becoming a two-party state, which, in effect, would mean a liberal-controlled state Democratic Party. To further emphasize her point, Randolph exclaimed, “It would help the liberals for it would keep people who are not Democrats from running as Democrats.” In other words, by 1961, because of their significant increase in strength, liberals had assumed the leadership of the state Democratic Party. 13

What course liberals would take in the runoff was initially discussed shortly following the first election, when many of them gathered at Scholz Beer Garden near the State Capitol to formulate strategy. Over pitchers of cold draft beer, they eventually reached three possible ways to address their “steamy dilemma.” First, they could take consolation in the prospect of a two-party system in Texas by voting for Tower. Second, they might refuse to vote for either, or third, they could wait for signals that Blakley might moderate. Consequently, Tower’s chances were enhanced considerably because

two of the strong liberal elements, *The Texas Observer* and Ralph Yarborough, supported an active liberal strategy. At the time, *The Observer* was considered to be the most influential liberal journal in Texas. Ronnie Dugger and Willie Morris were the chief editors of *The Observer*, whose strong staff of writers helped it maintain considerable clout among the state’s liberal intellectuals and political activists. Both Dugger and Morris shared the belief of many of their readers that liberals would benefit from a Tower victory because it would usher in a two-party system in Texas. Politically astute liberals had long recognized that their hopes of taking control of the Democratic Party machinery were contingent upon conservative Democrats switching to the Republican Party. Although the Republican Party had not previously been a viable alternative, it had begun to show its potential with Alger’s and Eisenhower’s victories, but most recently with Tower’s respectable showing in the general and ensuing special election. Hence, early in the runoff campaign, *The Observer* denied Blakley the boost he badly needed while eventually endorsing Tower.\(^{14}\)

Yarborough, the unquestioned political leader of liberal-labor forces in Texas, also avoided the issue of party loyalty. Many traced his refusal to the 1958 Senate election when Blakley challenged him in the Democratic primary and lost, and then refused to support him in the general election. Blakley also helped in trying to block Senator Yarborough’s Padre Island National Park bill. Thus, Yarborough sent a clear message to thousands of his supporters that he was not going to promote Blakley. Consequently, some young liberal activists, namely Chuck Caldwell and Dave Shapiro,

took it upon themselves to make the runoff a cause for two-party politics in Texas. Among the few liberals who had studied the dynamics of what a two-party system would mean for Texas’s future, Caldwell and Shapiro’s formula of driving the conservatives into the GOP so the liberals could control the Democratic Party sounded so simple. What they failed to access accurately, however, was just how many conservative Democrats there were. Another political observer provided a more accurate assessment when he stated, “it soon became obvious that a Democratic nomination was no longer tantamount to election in November.” In other words, conservative Democrats had begun to leave their party for the Republicans, but at the expense of the party’s monopoly on electoral power. Still, Caldwell and Shapiro began campaigning as best they could for Tower, acquiring substantial support from liberals such as Randolph, who flatly stated that she considered the impending runoff between Blakley and Tower a contest “between two Republicans,” and then added, “I do not regard William Blakley as the nominee of the Democratic Party.”

Randolph also sent out hundreds of potent anti-Blakley letters statewide, in which she stated that “Blakley has consistently worked against the Democratic program” since he joined the Senate, voting against it almost 100 percent even after he got in the runoff. Thus, she concluded, “I will do one of two things on May 27: either write in the name of a good Democrat, or go fishing. I can’t vote for a Republican and I can’t vote for a Dixiecrat.” Hence, “Going fishing” became the buzz words for those liberals who could

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not bring themselves to vote for Tower, but were convinced a vote for Blakley was even worse. Caldwell and Shapiro also arranged meetings with prominent liberals in Harris County, including Bob Hall and Chris Dixie, who were instrumental in blocking Blakley’s endorsement by a liberal group known as Harris County Democrats, which prompted the Houston Chronicle to speculate that a “large number of liberals are expected to stay home on election day, or even to vote for Republican John Tower.” Moreover, they outlined the statistical analysis of how high Republican primary voter turnout would eventually enhance liberal Democrat opportunities to be nominated. Furthermore, the Texas AFL-CIO’s Committee for Public Education, which usually backed Democratic nominees, indicated Blakley’s voting record revealed that he shared little, if any, of Kennedy’s views. Yet because Tower’s views coincided with the extremism of Goldwater, they would offer “no commitment.” Thus, as Caldwell and Shapiro campaigned as best they could for Tower – or more often, against Blakley – they were convinced that a Tower victory would change forever the course of Texas politics.16

By early 1961, it was also clear that Tower had begun to reap the benefits of Barry Goldwater conservatism. The latter’s belief in rugged individualism had made him more appealing to conservative Texans than Nixon. A survey conducted by The Texas Observer in the fall of 1961 concluded that “nine Lone Star Republicans in ten” would place themselves beside Goldwater in the political spectrum. Moreover, the publication of Goldwater’s Conscience of a Conservative in 1960 coincided perfectly with his

campaign for Tower, thus effectively drawing thousands of conservatives into Tower’s camp. Conservative winds, however, were blowing from other directions as well. In 1958, H.L. Hunt resurrected his old ‘Facts Forum’ radio program into ‘Life Line’, which wedded fundamentalist Protestantism with right-wing politics, consisting of straightforward ultraconservative, John Birch-style rhetoric – visceral attacks on Socialists, Democrats, liberals, the United Nations, and anyone who criticized the oil industry. ‘Life Line’ struck a chord in the late 1950s, particularly in the South, where dozens of small radio stations were happy to accept its cut-rate commentary. Although ‘Life Line’ debuted on twenty outlets in 1958, by the early 1960s its broadcasts could be heard on 354 stations in forty-seven states. Unknowingly, Hunt was laying the foundation of what twenty years later would become known as the Christian Right.17

Young conservative Texans, eager to learn, related to and were therefore influenced by the novels of Ayn Rand, particularly The Fountainhead, and the National Review magazine whose editor, William F. Buckley, Jr. was complemented by a number of strong conservative writers. This younger element of conservatives had broken with their parents’ conservative Democrat politics as they witnessed the changes occurring within the Democratic Party, thus realizing the need to belong to a party that was truly conservative. This shift was easily detected by Dallas Democratic Party leader Robert L. Clark, who informed House Speaker Sam Rayburn that “the Republican organizations in our cities are showing a superior ability to communicate with the younger voter, and the under-35 age group is being absorbed at a vital rate.” Among the more noted of this

group of young Republicans were women, who had organized into twenty-eight clubs – fourteen in Dallas county – by 1954 and demonstrated in Eisenhower’s victory in 1952 and Bruce Alger’s victory in 1954 that they were the “organizational sinew of the Republican Party.” Consequently, the Texas Federation of Republican Women (TFRW) was formed in 1955, which organized “Womanpower for Eisenhower” in 1956 and “Womanpower for Tower” in 1960.18

Tower’s alliance with Goldwater and the conservative movement also proved beneficial in the area of foreign policy. On April 17, about six weeks prior to the runoff election, the abortive Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba occurred. This surprising development helped Tower, who had taken the hard Goldwater line on foreign policy, including a strong stand against Fidel Castro’s communist regime. The failure of the venture was portrayed by Tower as another example of weakness in Kennedy’s foreign policy. Although Blakley did not defend Kennedy, having supported him in the election plus the party affiliation put Blakley on the defensive. Tower’s hard line on foreign policy also worked when he attacked Congress’ approval of President Kennedy’s plan to give foreign aid to communist countries while cutting back on defense plans. Addressing a crowd of approximately 200 in Corpus Christi while on a campaign swing through South Texas, Tower referred to Kennedy’s plan as “thinking I don’t understand,” and continued, “giving aid to Communist countries is giving direct aid to our enemies.” When Johnson began to advocate for the repeal of the Connally Amendment, which would have

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subjected the United States to the compulsory jurisdiction of the World Court, Tower also stood strong. Believing that being under the jurisdiction of the World Court was tantamount to being subjected to “the whims of communist and non-American courts,” Tower opposed its repeal. Tower scored his biggest hit in foreign policy, however, when he posed the question to Blakley of why he would not sign the pledge of the Committee of One Million to oppose the recognition of Red China by the United States. On January 9, Blakley was the only Southern senator who refused to sign the pledge. 19

As the runoff campaign garnered momentum Johnson, Governor Daniel, former Governor Shivers, and three of Blakley’s four major opponents in the special election rallied to Blakley’s side. Jim Wright, who barely missed the runoff, said it would be “childishly irresponsible” for him not to support the Democratic candidate while State Senator Henry B. Gonzalez said that it would be “simply wrong” for liberals not to support Blakley. Maury Maverick, however, did what most of the state’s liberals were doing behind the scene, either “going fishing” or voting for Tower. Most of the state’s newspapers rallied to Blakley’s cause. Of the 500 newspapers in Texas, counting dailies and weeklies, only fourteen supported Tower and none of those were in the four most populous cities except for the ailing Houston Press which was barely hanging on, trying to compete with the Houston Post and Houston Chronicle. Democratic National Committeeman John Bailey also offered support to Blakley, but naively reasoned that the overwhelming total Democratic vote in the special election over Tower “makes it certain”

that Blakley would win in the runoff. Blakley was also guilty of allowing the state’s Democratic euphoria to skew his view of the liberal-conservative divide and the party realignment which was well under way when he told his host of listeners at a Democratic state dinner in Austin, “I can find nothing in the Republican Party – its philosophy, its word, its program – that would encourage anyone in this state to leave the Democratic party – the party of all the people.”

In spite of the support of key party leaders and the state’s leading newspapers, the Tower campaign still knew that their candidate would garner at least as many votes (41.1 percent) as he had in the November election against Johnson. More encouraging, however, was the reality of Blakley’s candidacy, which was not only troublesome to liberals, but conservatives as well. For instance, when Governor Shivers appointed Blakley to fill Price Daniel’s Senate seat in 1957, when Daniel opted to run for governor, Blakley voted almost unanimously with liberals such as Kennedy, Hubert H. Humphrey, and Mike Mansfield, and he supported Johnson almost 100 percent. On the same roll-call votes he voted less than half the time with conservatives Goldwater, John McClellan, Richard Russell, Herman Talmadge, and James Eastland. Hence, Tower’s opportunity to paint Blakley as something other than a conservative loomed large during the campaign. For instance, at a campaign stop in Harlingen, Tower met with representatives of a group of conservative Democrats who the week before announced plans to switch to the Republican Party. The entire group included about 150 persons, including several past and present Cameron County Democratic officials. Moreover, Tower effectively showed

that Blakley was absent on forty percent of record votes during his first interim appointment, and missed ninety-five percent on record “Yea and Nay” votes between January 3 and April 14, 1961. Hence, on the eve of the election, a biting full page newspaper ad appeared in some of the state’s largest dailies featuring a picture of an empty chair with the top one third of the page in a bold headline which read, “TEXANS CAN’T AFFORD AN EMPTY SEAT IN THE UNITED STATES SENATE!” 21

In order to refute Tower’s charges, Blakley kept doggedly at his job in Washington, losing valuable campaign time, while Tower flew one hundred thousand miles and made eighty-nine major engagements in thirty-six days. Tower carried his battle for the conservative cause to El Paso and the Panhandle nine times, and into the Rio Grande Valley and deep East Texas eight times. Creating an image contrast between the two candidates, however, was another ploy that the Tower operatives used. They effectively portrayed Tower’s opponent as “Dollar Bill” Blakley because of the fortune he made as a Texas businessman, but on the other hand painted Tower, the young political science professor, as someone fresh from the classroom. Tower’s professorial image, therefore, facilitated him being viewed as articulate, intelligent, and reasonable. In such journals as The Texas Observer Blakley was also portrayed as a Southern reactionary who was insensitive to racial problems at a time when civil rights were being championed. One North Texas native who vividly recalled Tower’s candidacy remembered the stark contrast between him and Johnson, which presented a “new” and

“different” persona for Texas voters, who had never seen a political candidate so physically unimposing, yet so personally appealing. Moreover, to explain his political ideology, Tower was able to point to such figures as Thomas Jefferson, who had influenced him at an early age, and Edmund Burke, the philosophical founder of modern conservatism. Blakley, on the other hand, was unable to articulate his political philosophy in such a learned manner. 22

In addition to Blakley’s suspect voting record, tepid campaigning, and unfavorable image portrayal, Tower received a boost from the continued support of Republican volunteers, an endorsement from former President Eisenhower, and a series of speeches by Goldwater. The Arizona senator told reporters that Tower’s plurality of votes in the special election reflected “deep resentment” over the congressional leadership of former Senator Johnson and House Speaker Rayburn, but most recently against Speaker Rayburn for his handling of the House Rules Committee fight. Moreover, Goldwater told the Houston Press that he found it “surprising” to hear Blakley referred to as a conservative. Still, in spite of all the warning signs that a possible upset was in the making, thousands of voters continued to trust the state’s Democratic establishment by forecasting a Blakley victory, including Vice President Johnson. When asked about the upcoming runoff election a few days before while addressing the National Press Club in Washington, Johnson boldly predicted, “I think Texans are too intelligent to send a

Republican Senator to deal with a Congress two-thirds Democratic and a Democratic Administration.” Not only did Johnson miscalculate, but so did thousands of others who could not believe that a southern state steeped in Democratic tradition would ever send a Republican to the United States Senate. Thus, on May 27, in a razor thin victory, Tower became the first Republican from Texas elected to the United States Senate since Reconstruction when he tallied 448,217 votes to Blakley’s 437,874, a margin of 10,343 votes. 23

Hoyett Lemmon of Dallas reflected the sentiment of many Texas Democrats toward Tower’s victory two days following the election when he wrote, “I never thought I would live to see the day a Republican could be elected Senator in Texas.” Although many Democrats were well aware of the existing divisions within their own party and the recent Republican surge, they calmly dismissed Tower’s upset victory as a “fluke.” A closer study of the election, however, suggests a different summation. Two weeks before the runoff election, the nationally renowned Harris Poll took a survey that showed Blakley the likely winner with 49 percent of the vote, Tower with 32 percent, and undecided with 19 percent. The final voter outcome was Tower 50.5 percent and Blakley 49.5 percent. Puzzled by the outcome of the election, Louis Harris and his associates set out two days after the election to find out what had happened by re-interviewing everyone they had surveyed in the original poll. What they learned is shown in the following singular tabular form:

SHIFT IN TEXAS SENATE VOTE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In actual election (%)</th>
<th>In pre-election poll said would vote for (%)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Blakley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blakley</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tower</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didn’t Vote</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of a total number of 1,300,000 eligible voters who indicated that they would cast a ballot in the runoff election, a full 34 percent did not, thus reducing the total vote to 886,091, approximately 104,000 fewer votes than the first special election total of 990,233. Under normal voting conditions, it could be expected that the non-voting group would be drawn fairly equally out of the Blakley and Tower columns, with an even higher percentage of the undecided voters staying at home. In this election, the undecided voters stayed at home in about their usual numbers (34 percent of the total). The Tower voters, however, did not stay at home in their usual numbers (20 percent). Rather, the Tower voters who did not show at the polls shrank to only 9 percent while the Blakley voters yielded a staggering 52 percent who stayed at home on election day. In other words, out of every 100 voters who intended to vote and did not in the Texas election, 73 had intended to vote for Blakley.  

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Another study from the Democratic National Committee (DNC) as seen below reveals that the stay-at-home vote was unprecedented. In the first special election, 668,677 votes were the total cast for the five leading Democratic candidates. In the runoff, however, Blakley received 437,874 votes, less than 2/3 of the Democratic vote in the first special election. Of equal interest and importance is the fact that while Tower’s November to May drop-off was approximately 50 percent, the Democratic drop-off was approximately 67 percent. In other words, Blakley received only one-third of Johnson’s vote.

Tower . . . . . . . 321, 556  
* Blakley . . . . . . 186, 493  
* Wright . . . . . . 165, 147  
* Wilson . . . . . . 118, 349  
* Maverick. . . . . 102, 953  
* Gonzalez . . . . 95, 735

668, 677 (Democratic total) *  
990, 233 (Overall total)

(May)                                           (November)
Blakley  437, 874                        Johnson  1, 306, 625
Tower    448, 217                        Tower    926, 653
       886, 091                           2, 233, 278

Moreover, the DNC’s study concluded that the three major factors accounting for these results were: 1) thorough precinct work in the cities on behalf of Tower, 2) splits within the Democratic Party in both the first and second special elections, 3) many Democrats (Blacks, Mexicans, and liberals) stayed home because of Blakley’s conservatism.25

Regarding the first major factor, a subheading from the *Dallas Morning News* headlines the day after the election read, “Big City Votes Put Republican Ahead.” To

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25 Alan Fiellin, DNC staff to Lyndon Johnson, June 27, 1961; Vice-Presidential File, 1961-1963, Box 88, Johnson MSS.
place this within its proper context, by 1961, eleven cities within Texas had populations in excess of 100,000. Their importance in Texas elections is reflected by the fact that 49.2 percent of the 1960 presidential vote was cast in the eleven counties in which these cities are located. Tower not only won seven of these eleven cities, he ran up good majorities in the largest ones: Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, Fort Worth, Amarillo, and Galveston. Moreover, Harris County (Houston) went for Tower approximately two to one while El Paso gave him 11,306 votes to Blakley’s 7,218. Of the four cities that Blakley carried - Corpus Christi, Beaumont, Wichita Falls, and Austin - all except Corpus Christi were by slim margins, particularly Wichita Falls and Beaumont, both of which were decided by fewer than a thousand votes. Moreover, Blakley’s vote in these urban and suburban counties was only 29.9 percent of Johnson’s November vote. Hence, Tower’s Senate victory was a dramatic demonstration of what the population shift was doing to Texas politics. Before World War II, newspaper editors preparing to announce election results often would say, “let us wait until we hear from the forks of the creek,” because the country vote held the power then. The forks of the creek were definitely going for Blakley. The forks of the creek, however, no longer had as many votes. The population, thus the political power, had shifted to the cities. More importantly, this population shift increasingly came to be defined as largely white collar and middle class, the bedrock of the Texas Republicanism. The Texas Observer reinforced this fact a week following the election when it wrote,

More than any other factor, Tower’s victory stressed the political significance of the population shift from county to city in Texas and the growing Republican
allegiances of the technician-professional class, many Northern-born and educated, in the state’s metropolitan areas.\textsuperscript{26}

Regarding the second explanation of the DNC, the liberal-conservative divide within the Democratic Party had already clearly manifested itself in the special election; therefore, when two conservative candidates were pitted against one another for the runoff, there was no reason to believe that liberal Democrats would act any different than they had in 1954 when two conservatives were pitted against one another in the race for Dallas’s Fifth Congressional seat. Blakley’s conservatism was anathema to thousands of liberals across the state, who, like Maury Maverick and former National Committeewoman Reynolds, made it a point to either “go fishing” or vote for Tower on May 27. Tower biographer John R. Knaggs summed it up best when he wrote, “How many liberals voted for Tower will never be known, nor will it be known how many ‘went fishing’. . . . But it must be concluded that the liberal element was pivotal in electing the first Republican United States senator to represent Texas during the twentieth century.” Hence, with liberal voters pitted strongly against Blakley, the election essentially hinged upon whose brand of conservatism did the voters want, Blakley’s Democratic or Tower’s Republican. For Texas Republicans, that choice was easy, but even for many conservative Democrats, who realized that their party’s conservative roots were beginning to be undermined, that choice was becoming easier. Thus, like the liberal

Democrats, how many conservative Democrats voted for Tower will never be known; however, one must conclude that a good number of them, like the 150 in Harlingen, switched to the party that represented true conservatism.\footnote{Knaggs, Two-Party Texas, 15; “Tower Takes 8,525 Vote Lead Over Blakley in Senate Race,” Dallas Morning News, May 28, 2012.}

The stay-at-home vote of the Black and Mexican populations, according to the DNC, must also be factored into Tower’s victory. In twelve predominantly Black precincts in Houston, Blakley received only 13.3 percent of Johnson’s November vote – a drop off in Democratic vote far greater than the state-wide drop off. While Johnson received a plurality of more than 7,000 votes in these precincts, Blakley’s was only 629 votes. These twelve precincts accounted for approximately 30 percent of the vote of the predominantly Black precincts in Houston; however, Blakley’s estimated plurality in all Houston Black precincts was only 2,100. Since Kennedy’s November plurality was 28,695, this represented a net loss of 27,000 votes. Although much of this loss can be attributed to the different circumstances surrounding presidential and special senatorial elections, Blakley’s portrayal by The Texas Observer as a Southern reactionary insensitive toward racial issues resonated firmly among the state’s Black population. Moreover, Blakley’s well-publicized opposition to Kennedy’s appointment of Black Housing Chief Robert Weaver only exacerbated his problems with Black voters. Consequently, in Dallas County, like Harris, most noticeably among the Kennedy supporters who either chose to “sit it out” or turn to John Tower, were the Black voters. In retrospect, a vote by Blacks similar to that given Kennedy would easily have given Blakley a six-year term in the Senate. Instead, of the 19,220 poll tax holders in eighteen
precincts that were predominantly Black, less than 3,000 – or roughly 15 percent chose to exercise a voting option either for or against Blakley.\textsuperscript{28}

Although the Mexican vote was more difficult to access, the available data did suggest that the Mexicans also were apathetic toward the Blakley-Tower alternatives. Most noteworthy is the fact that the only two counties in which Blakley’s percentage of Johnson’s vote was less than 20 percent were Mexican. In five other predominantly Mexican counties, the Democratic vote drop-off was considerably greater than that for the entire state. Thus, the Mexican as well as Black vote comprised a key component of the Democratic liberal voters who either “went fishing” or voted for Tower on May 27. Still, Blakley’s inability to appeal not only to liberals, but a significant number of conservatives as well, spelled trouble for the Democrats. In the spring of 1961, when Kennedy’s “New Frontier” helped further polarize Texas politics, the talk around the capitol was, “You’re either for or against the Kennedys, and anyone out in the middle of the road will get run over.” By supporting the Kennedy-Johnson ticket in November, but not fully supporting the ‘New Frontier’, Blakley allowed himself to get caught somewhere in the middle. Unfortunately, that somewhere was not close enough to the right. In other words, although Blakley may have succeeded in garnering the middle of the road or state machine vote owned by Johnson, Governor Daniel, and former Governor Shivers, all of whom supported Blakley, he still needed a strong showing from his conservative base in order to win. Because of Blakley’s past voting record and his

support for the Kennedy-Johnson ticket, however, that was impossible. Thus, because of
Blakley’s middle-of-the-road candidacy, Tower not only stole part of the Democratic
liberal vote, but conservative as well, which together with his own party’s vote
constituted the “Big Breakthrough” that Texas Republicans had so long awaited. 29

In retrospect, perhaps the words of Dallas Democratic Party leader Robert L.
Clark following the election that “Tower’s election was anything but a fluke” are more
appropriate. The political scenario that had evolved in Texas by 1960 was such that it was
just a matter of time until a Republican breakthrough occurred. While the new tilt toward
liberalism in Washington continued to find an increasing number of adherents within
Texas’s Democratic Party, the shenanigans of Johnson in running for both reelection to
the United States Senate and Vice President simultaneously only increased divisions
within the Democrats. Meanwhile, the conservative movement fueled by such
personalities as Goldwater, Buckley, and Hunt resonated firmly among many Texans,
thus causing many young people as well as conservative Democrats to join the
Republican Party. Moreover, since the big city vote had played such a vital role in
Eisenhower’s 1952 and 1956 victories, there was no reason to believe that it would not be
a determining factor once again in 1960-1961. Blakley’s middle-of-the-road candidacy
plus his insensitivity toward racial issues, which precipitated an unprecedented number of
stay at home and Democrats for Tower voters, provided another factor in the equation for
Tower’s victory. Tower himself, the final ingredient, just so happened to be the right
candidate in the right place, and at the right time. In other words, the stage had been set

29 Alan Fiellin, DNC staff to Vice President Lyndon Johnson, June 27, 1961; Vice Presidential
File, 1961-1963, Box 88, Johnson MSS; Knaggs, Two-Party Texas, 8.
or the time was ripe for a Republican breakthrough because of the deep divisions within Texas’s Democratic Party and the conservative winds that were making inroads among Texas Republicans as well as Democrats. All that was needed was an incumbent United States Senator from Texas who was ambitious enough to seek two offices simultaneously, thus forcing a special election. Fortunately for Texas Republicans, Democrats had just the right man in Lyndon Johnson, the old master of the slow count and rigger of elections.  

Not surprisingly, Vice President Johnson declined comment on Tower’s victory while visiting Texas the Sunday following the election. The Texas Observer summed up Democratic reaction as a “deep-seated reluctance” to recognize that the old rural Democratic vise had been loosened in Texas forever, that lingering memories of Reconstruction had lost their influential hold, that the cities of Texas had become the seats of genuine political power, and that the state Republican Party had become a rising force to be reckoned with at all levels. Friends of John Tower rubbed it in by stating, “A fluke? It’s difficult to accidentally defeat seventy opponents.” Former State Republican Chairman Thad Hutchinson of Houston served the notice of what was in store for the future of Texas politics by stating, “From this day on, no major election will take place in the state without a Republican candidate,” while current state chairman Tad Smith warned that that there would soon be an “all-out effort” to convert conservative Democrats. Both forecasted accurately as Tower’s victory became a major catalyst for

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the growth of the Republican Party in Texas, or, according to a Republican state senator “what really set the Republican Party on the road.” This was first exemplified in the 1962 elections although two Republicans – Ken Kohler of Amarillo, and George Korkmas of Alvin – were elected to the Texas House late in 1961 by special elections, which created the largest GOP bloc in the state House since Reconstruction. The race, however, that had the victorious Republicans basking in the thought of a two-party system was the upcoming race for governor, the state’s premier political prize.31

Republican fortunes continued to grow when they were able to recruit a gubernatorial candidate who had already established name identification by having run a statewide race. Jack Cox, a former state representative from Breckenridge who operated as an oil well drilling contractor, came within 436 votes of unseating Congressman Omar Burleson in 1952 before making a credible showing in the 1960 Democratic gubernatorial primary when he tallied 619,834 votes in his loss to Price Daniel, who received 908,992. More importantly, however, Cox had since switched over to the Republican Party because in Cox’s words the Democrats were “dedicated to a course which can lead only to the destruction of the basic political and civil rights guaranteed by our Constitution,” referring to the national party’s embracement of the “New Frontier”. As troubling to Cox, however, was the number of members of the state Democratic Party who also supported the liberal ideas of the “New Frontier,” including Governor Daniel. “It is obvious now

that a governor of the Democratic Party is hopelessly tied by the machinery in Washington,” Cox told a Fort Worth crowd in October. Consequently, Cox urged them that they must elect a Republican governor “to avoid federal domination of state government.” Held in an atmosphere of bustling confidence, Cox’s address coincided a giant “resignation rally” where over 500 Fort Worth Democrats formally joined the ranks of the Republican Party.\(^{32}\)

Although Cox’s candidacy was a glimpse of Republican momentum in Texas following Tower’s election, the true measure was found in the record number of Republican candidates who filed to run across the board in the 1962 elections. For the first time since Reconstruction, Republicans had a candidate for every major statewide office. Moreover, the Republicans had candidates in 18 of Texas’s 23 congressional districts (compared with five in 1960), including three contested GOP primaries. They planned for campaigns in ten of the state’s 31 senatorial districts and for 70 of the 150 seats in the Texas House of Representatives when compared to 1960 when Republicans ran for only 19 seats in the House and three in the Senate. Thus, by comparing the number of Republican candidates who would run in 1962 with the number who ran in 1960, the sheer impact of Tower’s victory is understood. Republicans also were gleeful in knowing that for only the second time in the state’s history a contested Republican gubernatorial primary would be held since the 1960 Republican gubernatorial nominee, William Steger of Tyler, polled more than 200,000 votes in the last general election.

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Thus, in the 1962 primary, Jack Cox faced Roy Whittenburg, an Amarillo publisher and rancher. The Republican hope was that a gubernatorial primary would attract a large number of conservative Democrats, which, in effect, would catch conservative Democrats in a vise between Republicans and liberal Democrats, something unprecedented in Texas campaigns. In other words, Democrats would not only be fighting Republicans, but themselves as well.33

On the Democratic side, conservatives were uneasy about the primary and uncertain about the general election in the wake of Tower’s victory. For the first time, scenarios were being discussed around Austin whereby a Republican or liberal might become governor. The Democrats, however, suffered from no shortage of likely candidates for the 1962 gubernatorial race. Incumbent Governor Price Daniel faced a large field of strong opponents which included Attorney General Will Wilson of Dallas; Marshall Formby, an influential legislator from East Texas; retired former Army General Edwin A. Walker; Houston attorney Don Yarborough, a liberal, but no relation to Senator Ralph Yarborough; and Secretary of the Navy John Connally. Since Yarborough was the only liberal in the race, liberals were able to unite behind one candidate, unlike the 1961 Senate race. Although many in the conservative Democrat faction were committed to stay behind incumbent Daniel, others looked to Connally, the handsome Johnson protégé who entered the race without any Austin-based political scars from sparring with the legislature. Moreover, by virtue of strong political ties to Democratic loyalists through Sam Rayburn, and on the strength of support from some conservative elements of the

33 “Texas Republican Aggression on Large Scale,” The Texas Observer, May 2, 1962; Knaggs, Two-Party Texas, 20; Olien, From Token to Triumph, 179.
business community stemming from his service as attorney to Sid Richardson, one of Texas’s so called “Big Rich” oilmen, Connally was viewed as the front-runner. As expected, Yarborough secured his liberal base to finish second, but Connally led all conservatives with 30 percent of the vote, which constituted 113,512 more votes than Yarborough’s 317,986. Daniel’s support was eroded by the sales tax he had fought and the multi-candidate field, causing him to finish third with 248,524 votes.34

Meanwhile, in the Republican primary Cox sailed past Whittenburg 99,170 to 16,136; however, the fact that more than 115,000 conservatives voted in the Republican primary meant that Connally was denied that potential vote for his runoff campaign. As expected, the Democratic runoff between Connally and Yarborough went down to the wire while liberal hearts beat rapidly at the prospect of electing the first governor of their liking since Jimmy Allred in the 1930s. Although the Liberal-labor political forces were outspent by the financing of the Connally campaign, they were well organized and highly motivated by Yarborough, who effectively united labor, liberal intellectuals, minority groups, and farmers. Still, in a tough, bitter contest right down to the wire, Connally pulled out a slim victory by 565,174 to 538,924, a margin of only 26,250. Thus, by 1962, it was quite evident that the strength of the liberal Democrats was such that they were on the verge of taking control of Texas’s Democratic Party, and, if not for the efforts of Vice President Johnson, they might well have done so. Johnson knew that if Connally won the nomination, he was far enough to the left of Cox that liberals would not boycott him to the extent they had Blakley in the general election. Moreover, Johnson envisioned

Connally spending four years in the Governor’s Mansion and then whipping Senator Tower in the Republican’s bid for re-election in 1966. Connally’s simultaneous support from both conservative businessmen and liberal-leaning Mexican-American leaders within a few days after he announced his candidacy confirmed the Vice President’s scheme. “We know what Lyndon is doing,” complained one leading Texas liberal, “He’s reversing the trend of a two-party system. We’re in bad trouble.”

In the general election in 1962 it was clear to see that Johnson’s rationale was true as Connally took a significant amount of conservative support from the business community and also garnered an especially large Hispanic vote. Like previous elections, however, liberal Democrats who were stung by their candidate’s defeat in the primary or special election sought healing in working for a two-party state. Hence, David Copeland, who had served as campaign coordinator for Yarborough in the Democratic Primary, formed Texans for a Two-Party Texas and endorsed Cox. Unfortunately, however, Copeland learned that for liberals it was far easier to not support Blakley than Connally. Moreover, Connally had the support of the state’s vast network of Democratic political leaders and officeholders in addition to an almost solid lineup of newspapers. For instance, Henry Gonzalez appeared with Connally in San Antonio to remind fellow Latinos and liberals that “there ain’t no such thing as a neutral.” The rural connections of Price Daniel and Sam Rayburn rallied to shore up sagging support for Connally in East Texas; and with the help of Lyndon Johnson, Connally coaxed the labor vote in Fort Worth and in the Gulf Coast cities. Nursing a grudge, however, from Connally’s close

ties to the state’s dominant corporate interests, labor yielded an unenthusiastic endorsement of Connally, even after Ralph Yarborough, the titular leader of the liberal-labor faction, intervened on Connally’s behalf. Yet, even with little labor support, Connally could be assured of victory if he maintained the commitment of the conservative Democrats in Texas.36

Cox, on the other hand, day after day admonished voters to “keep Texas free from Washington control” by rejecting Connally, Kennedy’s candidate. Cox also continually criticized Connally for his past ties with Vice-President Johnson, whom he said was trying to elect a hand picked candidate. “Now, remember, LBJ stands for Lyndon’s Boy, John,” Cox would exclaim. Acting to fuse anti-Kennedy, anti-Johnson, and anti-Connally sentiment, Cox identified his own candidacy squarely with conservative positions on such issues as the power of the United States Supreme Court and federal regulation of the oil industry. In order to further discredit the alliance between Johnson and Connally, Cox’s campaign team exploited the 1948 Democratic primary for the Senate when Johnson questionably defeated Coke Stevenson. Cox even went to great lengths to show that one of Texas’s famed criminals, Billie Sol Estes, was helping finance the Connally campaign. Connally’s rebuttal, however, consisted of making light of the fact that in Cox’s six years in the Texas legislature, he never passed a major piece of legislation, and also pointed out that Cox missed 706 votes while serving. Perhaps Connally’s most stinging indictment of Cox was that “They (Texans) don’t want a turncoat Texan for governor,” referring, of course, to Cox’s earlier switch from the Democratic to Republican Party. Yet, in Texas’s

36 Olien, From Token to Triumph, 181-84; Knaggs, Two-Party Texas, 23.
unending saga of political irony, Connally would follow suit approximately eleven years
later by joining the Republicans. 37

Although the underlying issues of the campaign were Connally being too closely
tied to Washington and Cox being a “radical” or too far to the right, the election perhaps
turned on a couple of unexpected developments during the campaign. The first was
partisanship over the proposed Trinity River Project, which had been fought for by those
Texans who would benefit for thirty years. While Connally wholeheartedly supported the
project, Cox was initially opposed but waffled later in the campaign. The greatest
unexpected event, however, that many pundits believed put Connally over the top was the
October 1962 Cuban Missile crisis, where Kennedy’s mettle shone brightly, thus creating
a “rally around the President” syndrome. The Dallas Morning News stated, “Cuba has
relegated other national issues to a back seat in the home-stretch drive of the campaign.”
Consequently, on November 7, Connally was elected Texas’s forty-first governor by
defeating Jack Cox 847,036 to 715,025, or 54 percent to 46 percent. Texas Republicans
would complain for years that they were “Cubanized” out of winning the race.38

Connally, unlike Blakley in 1961, was able to hold enough of the traditional
Democratic Party vote while still not alienating an overwhelming number of liberal
voters. Hence, Connally’s victory was built on the traditional rural bulwark of the

37 Olien, From Token to Triumph, 182; Knaggs, Two-Party Texas, 24-27; “Candidates for

Experts Cautious on Election Predictions,” Dallas Morning News, Nov. 4, 1962; Kingston, Atlesey, and
Crawford, Texas Almanac’s Political History of Texas, 303.
Democratic Party and on the Latino counties, the latter of which provided half his margin of victory, 130,000 votes. *The Texas Observer* showed that Connally polled 93 percent of the combined Latino and African American vote, which it partly attributed to Connally being the only conservative candidate in Texas ever to grant positions of status and authority inside his campaign organization to leaders and would-be leaders of the African American and Latin-American communities. He also won Corpus Christi, El Paso, San Antonio, Fort Worth, and Laredo, along with Cameron, Hidalgo, Duval, and Gonzalez counties, with comfortable margins while holding the Democratic cities of Austin, Beaumont, Port Arthur, Galveston, and Wichita Falls safely. Hence, Connally won back three major cities that Republicans had won in the Tower-Blakley contest. Cox, on the other hand, was unable to pull off the “big revolt” that was expected from so many conservatives. *The Dallas Morning News* commented that the Democrats, while “running scared, turned back the most serious threat to their political hold on the state since Reconstruction Days.” Still, Republicans sensed somewhat of a victory even in defeat. Cox’s 46 percent, or 715,025 votes was the largest percentage that a Republican had received since 1932 when prohibition candidate Orville Bullington amassed 38 percent, or 317,590 against Miriam “Ma” Ferguson. 39

Overall, a record number seven Republicans (six from Dallas County) won seats in the Texas House; however, the two previously elected through special elections were

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defeated. No Republican victories occurred in the state Senate, although a number of candidates ran close races. Republican national committeeman Albert B. Fay of Houston made it a point to emphasize that Republicans “doubled” their contingent in Congress by returning Bruce Alger and electing Ed Foreman of Odessa, who defeated Democratic incumbent J.T. “Slick” Rutherford from the Sixteenth Congressional District in West Texas. Republicans would have had a third congressional seat if Bill Steger of Tyler had not been narrowly nosed out by Lindley Beckworth, the incumbent from Gladewater by only 2,000 votes out of almost 52,000 cast. In county races, Republican judges were elected in Midland, Harrison, and Ector counties while a Republican was re-elected in Kerr County. The election of Barbara Culver in Midland made her the only woman in the state to hold that office. Moreover, a former Democrat state legislator, R.L. Strickland, was elected justice of the peace as a Republican in Bexar County, where the GOP also added another justice of the peace. Other noted Republican victories were a district attorney in Smith County; county commissioners in Pecos, Hutchinson, Ector, Zavala, and Randall Counties; a constable in Potter County; and a county school superintendent in El Paso. When compared to two years earlier when Texas had only one Republican congressman and not one state legislator, it was easy to conclude that the swirling winds of new conservatism were indeed blowing strongly across Texas during 1962. Hence, Tower’s victory had certainly been the “Big Breakthrough” that Republicans needed, which caused them to eagerly anticipate the 1964 elections. 40

CHAPTER 4

JFK, THE GREAT SOCIETY, AND VIETNAM

Approximately a month after the November 1962 elections, The Texas Observer wrote, “Texas now is Texas new, the old order is passing away.” Believing that the Republicans strong showing in the recent elections was an indication that two-party status had arrived in Texas, the Observer substantiated its claim by referring to John Tower’s victory, which, in its words, “so weakened” the conservative wing of the Democratic Party that it could barely prevail over the liberal wing in the party’s 1962 spring primaries. John Connally’s 51 percent of the vote against his liberal counterpart Don Yarborough in the Democratic gubernatorial primary provided further evidence for the Observer’s assertion. Thus, according to the Observer, it would be unrealistic for conservative Democrats to anticipate victories over liberal Democrats in future primary elections because “too many of their troops have gone away.” The Observer reinforced this theme by referring to the large number of women who helped with Jack Cox’s campaign:

You can’t have all those little old ladies running around putting up Cox signs, staffing telephone committees, and attending precinct planning meetings without creating a special bond that transcends politics. They look upon all Democrats regardless of their labels, as outside their social circles. They aren’t coming back brother. ¹

The tremendous rise in the voting power of African Americans and Latin-Americans was the second point, which, according to the Observer, gave an ever-broadening base to the coalition of liberals, labor, and minorities. Roughly 100,000 Blacks voted in November 1962 in Texas, a statistic that raised the brow of every politician. The Observer pointed to the emergence of well trained and energetic Republican precinct organizations in medium sized cities, small towns, and even rural areas as the third factor attributing to the state’s two-party status. Fourth, but most convincing, the Observer recalled the six short years, beginning in 1956, that it took San Antonio’s conservative Democrats to move into the Republican Party. By 1962 there was a conservative Republican Party and a liberal Democratic Party, and the old conservative Democratic tradition that dated back to the Civil War was dead. In 1956, when the liberals united behind Henry Gonzalez to upset the incumbent conservative Democratic state senator, Ozzie Latimer, by a few hundred votes, the upstart Republicans had seized the opportunity of running against a liberal. They lost, but they learned a few lessons and sought a clan of recruits from among Latimer’s former friends in the Democratic Party. In 1960, the Shivercrats made a gallant effort to reclaim their former days of glory by launching a massive assault on Gonzalez. Four years had passed since 1956, and there were now thousands of card-carrying Republican precinct workers who watched from the political sidelines as Gonzalez massacred the conservative candidate, R.L. Strickland by 17,000 votes in the Democratic primary. In the wreckage of that defeat, the decampment of conservative Democrats to the GOP became almost total.\(^1\)

The same condition that existed in Bexar County before Gonzalez’s election in 1956, according to the Observer, prevailed statewide in 1962 whereby the conservative Democratic organizations appeared to be in good shape, but in reality were “sick as a dog.” Hence, the Observer predicted

One of these days, and it could be in 1964, the Po’ folks, that grand coalition which Andrew Jackson and Franklin Roosevelt put together to drive the money changers out of the temple in Washington, are going to reclaim the Texas Democratic Party; it’s their party; it’s the party of the people. ²

Moreover, the Observer was adamant in emphasizing that Texas’s Democratic Party did not belong to John Connally, Lyndon Johnson, and Preston Smith, or the Dallas banks, the power companies and the corporations. Thus, as Texas’s chief organ of the liberal press continued to beat its drums loudly across the state, Texas Republicans looked forward to the 1964 elections, knowing, of course, that the increasing strength of the liberal Democrats effectively continued to push conservatives their way. Because Barry Goldwater had warmed the hearts of so many conservative Texans while campaigning for Tower, the thought of a Goldwater candidacy also caused Republicans to view the upcoming presidential election with great optimism.³

By 1963, not just in Texas, but throughout the South, the increasing prominence of the civil rights issue and the more aggressive liberalism of the Kennedy administration on this and other issues had caused more die-hard Southerners to despair of relying any more on the Democrats and to transfer their allegiance to the Republicans. As infiltrations of these people pushed the Republican organizations further to the right, Senator

Goldwater emerged as the answer to their prayers. While his economic philosophy was pleasing to Southerners, his opposition to federal interference on the race issue in the sphere of states where Jim Crow was still a religion was what many Southerners wanted desperately to hear. Taking the lead in Texas for securing Goldwater the Republican nomination was newly elected state GOP chairman Peter O’Donnell, who became national chairman of the “Draft Goldwater Committee,” an unauthorized ad hoc group that was clamoring for a Goldwater candidacy in 1964. Launched in April 1963, the committee had a strong impact within the Republican ranks, particularly in Texas, where Tower was such a prominent spokesman for Goldwater and his philosophy. ⁴

Assuming Goldwater would eventually run, his most likely opponent in a showdown for the nomination would be New York Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller, viewed scornfully by Texas Republicans as the “leader of the Eastern establishment liberals.” O’Donnell, Tower, and their allies dreamed of a fundamental change in the Republican Party whereby a Goldwater presidency would break forever the Eastern seaboard domination. Moreover, Texas Republicans were itching for a battle between Kennedy and Goldwater because they could easily exploit the dichotomy between a liberal and his Eastern-oriented “New Frontier” and a conservative champion of the Sunbelt and the West. Although Goldwater’s recent books, The Conscience of a Conservative and Why Not Victory? had captivated the hearts of grass roots volunteers, his support also came from Texas money circles not tied to the state’s Democratic

establishment. Since it was easier for O’Donnell to build a stronger party around a
Goldwater candidacy than conservative principles, the destinies of the Texas GOP and
Goldwater became “tightly intertwined.” Thus, it came as no surprise in May when the
Observer wrote, “The Goldwater – for – President boom . . . is now being gunned in large
part from Texas. “ In fact, Texas Republicans were “all but swamped” by their
enthusiasm for Goldwater. 5

A potential Goldwater candidacy not only resonated enthusiastically among Texas
Republicans, but those in other southern states as well. For instance, on April 24, The
Atlanta Constitution ran a story taken from a survey of other state GOP chairmen across
the South. The survey showed that of the 305 delegate votes in the South, some 250 were
already Goldwater’s, more than a year ahead of convention time. The only state in Dixie
that would be a possible exception, according to the survey, was rigidly Democratic
Georgia. Alabama’s Chairman John Grenier added that Goldwater’s pluralities in his
state would “shock even the most professional politicians” while North Carolina
Chairman Robert L. Gavin commented that a Goldwater candidacy would have a
“stronger appeal” to those Democratic conservatives than Governor Rockefeller of New
York. Mississippi Chairman Wirt A. Yerger emphasized that Goldwater was the only
candidate who could beat Kennedy. Texas Chairman O’Donnell became even more
optimistic when he predicted a couple of weeks later that “the South will take the lead in
making Kennedy a one-term president.” O’Donnell also leased office space in

5 Knaggs, Two-Party Texas, 32-33; “Political Intelligence,” The Texas Observer, May 16, 1963;
Weeks, Texas in 1964, 3.
Washington, which became the nerve center for the national Goldwater-for-President movement. 6

Republican optimism during the first part of 1963 also resulted from three special elections for seats in the Texas House of Representatives, all of which went to Republicans. Hughes Brown and Jack Sampsell won seats in Dallas County, and Chuck Scoggins of Corpus Christi won in Nueces County, where Republicans were not supposed to win. The victories brought the Republican totals to an unprecedented number of ten in the 150-member Texas House, and the relative ease with which they won had Democrats concerned. Another major development for Texas’s GOP in 1963, yet the most far-reaching, was when George Herbert Walker Bush announced his candidacy for the 1964 United States Senate race. The son of GOP Senator Prescott Bush of Connecticut, Bush had held campaign leadership positions in Texas for Eisenhower’s two campaigns and had served as party chairman for Midland and Harris Counties while pursuing his oil well business ventures. Bush’s love affair with Texas began during World War II while he was stationed at Corpus Christi Naval Air Station to train as a carrier pilot. Hence, following his graduation from Yale, he and his family returned to Midland, Texas, in 1948 to become part of the West Texas oil boom. Although Bush’s work began with an oil field services company, he eventually was buying and trading oil leases, which led to his partnership with Hugh Liedtke. Together, Bush and Liedtke formed Zapata Petroleum, which by 1955 was producing 1,250 barrels a day, making Bush and Liedtke minor millionaires. Bush, however, split off and made his fortune in

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offshore drilling while Leidtke engineered a series of mergers and hostile acquisitions that produced the Texas giant Pennzoil.⁷

Bush’s move to Houston in 1959, however, catapulted his political career. There Bush met such men as Jim Baker, whose grandfather founded Houston’s giant Baker & Botts law firm, and Bob Mosbacher, a young wildcatter who struck oil in South Texas. Bush eventually befriended two prominent attorneys, Leon Jaworski and Bob Strauss. With the help of these men and others, Bush began testing the political waters in Houston while rising through the ranks of the Harris County GOP to eventually become county chairman in 1963. Bush not only represented a formidable candidate for the Republicans, but also at a critical point in Texas political history. After almost twenty years of ultraconservative rule, the last of the true hard-liners, Allen Shivers, had been swept from state office in 1957, the same year that Lyndon Johnson finally secured control of the state Democratic Party and Texans voted into office a liberal senator, Ralph Yarborough. The era of Pappy O’Daniel, Roy Cullen and Joe McCarthy was ending, swept away by new ideas, new people, and new times exemplified by “organization” men such as George Bush. Not for “hillbilly bands,” “bags of cash,” or “ten gallon hats,” Bush was an “eastern-bred country-club Republican” who did not want to change the status quo, but run it. By 1957, the cities in Texas were being filled with gray-suited executives who thought the way Bush did, and they would see to it that Bush got that chance. Hence,

Bush would not only bring new life to the state’s flagging oil industry, but the Republican Party as well.  

Hoping to ride the crest of Goldwater mania in Texas, George Bush told the press at his announcement of candidacy that Ralph Yarborough is “diametrically opposed to everything I believe in.” Whereas Yarborough was a federal interventionist, Bush believed in the finest concept of states’ rights – in keeping the government closest to the people. Bush’s hopes also rested on the realistic expectation that Yarborough would face another bitter primary race, and win or lose, his candidacy would again send legions of disappointed Democrats to the Bush camp. Before a crowd of Republican state committee members at a Driskill Hotel breakfast, Tower endorsed Bush’s candidacy by predicting that the GOP would gain twenty House seats and two Senate seats in Congress if “the right man is nominated for president.” On the state level, House Republicans predicted that Republicans’ strength would multiply by at least 100 percent in the next legislature. Texas Republicans were also banking on another Don Yarborough – Connally gubernatorial primary fight that would split Texas Democrats even worse than in 1962, paving the way for the first Republican governor since Reconstruction. Liberal optimism was voiced in the Observer, which stated, “Lyndon and Connally are so scared that they’ve even started to give the po’ folks a few crumbs off the table. Lyndon quakes in his Neiman-Marcus boots every time he remembers that Don Yarborough came within 25,000 votes of beating Connally” in 1962. Thus, by summer of 1963, Republicans were

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“tingling with excitement” for the upcoming election while liberal hopes were at an all
time high.9

Republican hopes received another boost in September 1963 when the Fort Worth
Star Telegram reported that former State Representative Tom James of Dallas announced
he was leaving the Democratic ranks to join the Republican Party. James, the former
vice-fighting legislator who ran unsuccessfully for attorney general in 1962, told the
press that it would be “intellectually dishonest” to continue to support a party that
opposed every principle for which he stood. James’ only political plans were to bring
other conservative Democrats into the GOP by forming a committee that would work
toward a “mass resignation” of conservatives from the Democratic Party. Growing
confidence within the Republican ranks received another boost in the middle of
November when National Republican Committeeman Albert Fay of Houston projected in
the Observer that Goldwater could beat Kennedy in Texas by 100,000 votes if the
election were held then. The most compelling prediction, however, came from the
Houston Chronicle on the morning of November 22, 1963 when it released a new
statewide poll showing that if the election were held then between Goldwater and JFK,
Goldwater would garner 1.3 million votes to Kennedy’s 1.2 million. Civil rights had
emerged as the single most important point on which Kennedy had alienated Democrats
who might otherwise stick with him. In addition, it reported that Johnson’s popularity in
Texas was at an all-time low, except in South Texas. Since the Chronicle poll had been

9 “Ex-Senator’s Son Likes Goldwater,” Dallas Morning News, Sept. 12, 1963; Olien, From Token
to Triumph, 191; “South Will Help Beat JFK In 1964, O’Donnell Predicts,” Dallas Morning News, May 12,
so close to the actual result of the 1962 gubernatorial election, its poll in 1963 was well received.10

Texas’s most reliable political pollster or prognosticator, however, could not have possibly forecasted what would occur only a few hours following the *Chronicle’s* report when bullets from an assassin fatally struck JFK and severely wounded Governor Connally in downtown Dallas. Moreover, Texas Republicans could not have imagined a worst case scenario because suddenly, Johnson was thrust into the presidency, which changed the whole course of Democratic Party politics in the state. The conservative-liberal divide within the Texas Democrats had reached a crescendo just before President Kennedy’s fatal visit to Texas as the liberal forces looked to Senator Ralph Yarborough for leadership and the state’s moderates and conservatives looked to Johnson and Connally. Kennedy’s trip to Dallas, therefore, was largely to resolve the factional controversy within Texas’s Democratic Party before the election of 1964, and as an outward show of unity Kennedy had the three leaders of Texas’s Democratic Party ride in his Dallas motorcade. It was indeed fortuitous that on his last ride John F. Kennedy was accompanied by the three men who represented the principal divisions of the state’s Democratic Party – Johnson, the middle of the road; Connally of the right and right

center; and Yarborough of the left and left-center, all of whom were together in what was arguably the greatest tragedy for the National Democratic Party.11

Ironically, Kennedy’s death accomplished his purpose in Texas perhaps better than he could have done had he lived. Johnson, who was suddenly thrust into the presidency, was forced to become more identified with Kennedy’s liberal policies. Connally, who had long been the political friend of Johnson, could not follow him entirely in his new liberal path but could not afford to desert him either. Yarborough, who became closer to Johnson by sharing a common grief experience, could not refuse to support the new President and his closer identification with the Kennedy policies. In other words, only the extremes of an uncompromising left and right were left out of the Texas Democrats’ new alignment. The extreme left was rendered mute with no place to go; the extreme right could go Republican with Goldwater. Thus, whether by fate or fortune, Johnson was suddenly the leader of a restored Texas Democratic Party, and however much he thought it necessary to assume Kennedy’s liberal agenda as president, he remained in the eyes of Texans a middle-of-the-roader, a master compromiser, and a thoroughgoing opportunist. In his Texas political activities, he had never gone too far to the right or left, and while in Congress, he never deserted his conservative Texas friends.

Johnson, essentially, had catered to all people, and in 1964, Texans exemplified this more than anybody else, but at the expense of the Republican Party. 12

Most disheartening for the Republicans was that the Democrats could now boast that they had a native son, incumbent in the White House, which presented a whole new political dynamic for the upcoming presidential election. Texas Republicans had been spoiling for the chance to challenge someone as diametrically opposed to conservatism as Kennedy, yet with the quick firing of three shots, it all came to an end. Suddenly, their opponent was someone that many southern conservatives, particularly Texans, had supported in the 1960 Democratic presidential primary; therefore, it was likely they would do so again. In other words, a Goldwater-Johnson race would not offer Texas voters a clear choice between a liberal and a conservative. In addition, influential allies such as Oveta Culp Hobby and Robert B. Anderson, cabinet members of the Eisenhower administration, deserted the GOP and endorsed Johnson, as did former Governor Shivers, who retained widespread political contacts in Texas business circles and in rural counties in the southwestern part of the state. Within the party, Edward T. Dicker, Dallas oilman and builder, who in 1951 became the first Republican member of the legislature since Reconstruction, inverted the Texas custom of “Democrats for the Republican” in presidential contests into a “Republicans for Johnson” movement. In Houston, Paul Vogler, a Corpus Christi contractor, spearheaded the movement, while County

12 Weeks, Texas in 1964, 4-6; Olien, From Token to Triumph, 190; Knaggs, Two-Party Texas, 36-37.
Democratic Chairman Bill Kilgarlin urged all those who could not vote the straight Democratic ticket to “get the hell out of the party.”

The sudden turn of events which left the Republicans reeling and the Democrats confident was first reflected in a special election on November 9 for the seat of Congressman Homer Thornberry of Austin, who vacated Johnson’s old Central Texas Tenth district to accept a judgeship. After Johnson handpicked his longtime associate J.J. (Jake) Pickle for the post, liberals refused his pick and rallied behind Jack Ritter, Jr., of Austin, a former state legislator, and the Republicans threw their support behind Jim Dobbs, a former Church of Christ minister and radio announcer for H.L. Hunt’s LIFE LINE, who had lost to Thornberry in the 1962 general election. Pickle’s establishment Democratic support initially appeared to be overwhelming; however, because of the divisive liberal Democratic vote which tallied 12,917 votes, he barely finished first with only 14,386 out of 41,115 votes cast and faced a stiff runoff from Dobbs who garnered 13,630 votes. The Republican-liberal Democrat coalition proved particularly formidable in Travis County, the most populous of the ten counties in the district, where Dobbs won despite Austin being Johnson’s backyard where he owned the only television station and received strong support from the Austin American-Statesman, the only daily newspaper. By the time of the runoff in December, however, it was evident that the impact of Kennedy’s assassination had shattered the Republican-liberal Democratic alliance. Pickle

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defeated Dobbs by 27,206 votes to 16,039, riding almost total Democratic unity behind Johnson in a race that had initially looked promising for the Republicans.\(^{14}\)

Republican hopes were further dampened with the beginning of the New Year when the *Dallas Morning News* released the results of a nationwide Gallup Poll survey showing that if Goldwater ran against Johnson, Johnson would receive 75 percent of the vote, and Goldwater 20 percent, while 5 percent were undecided. If Richard Nixon was the Republican nominee, however, he would poll 24 percent of the vote against Johnson’s 69 percent, while 7 percent were undecided. Although Nixon was stronger than Goldwater on a national basis, both showed about equal strength when the results were limited to the South with Nixon receiving 23% of the vote to Goldwater’s 24%. Outside the South, Nixon again fared better than Goldwater with 25% to 19%. Most discouraging for the state’s Republicans, however, was the Texas Poll, showing that Johnson would walk away with Texas over every major Republican contender. Hence, on January 4, the *Dallas Morning News* reported that “by and large the steam has gone out of the Goldwater movement,” which was the major political phenomenon in 1963 prior to Kennedy’s death. That loss of steam could largely be attributed to Southern Democrats, who could have been counted on to give major support to Goldwater two months ago, but were now reappraising their position. Although they did not like some of the stands taken by President Johnson, it was the same Democrats who in 1960 were almost unanimously for Johnson as the Democratic presidential nominee. To most Southerners, he was still

regarded as “one of us,” despite the transition Johnson had made from regional politician to national figure.\textsuperscript{15}

Texas Republican fortunes in 1964 suffered not only from the presence of native son Lyndon Johnson on the Democratic ticket, but also from the press’s identification of Republicans with the right-wing extremism that seemingly had taken over Texas politics, particularly in Dallas, during the early 1960s. Part of the press’s blame was because of the emergence of the controversial John Birch Society, a militant ad hoc anti-Communist organization that was strong in Dallas. Its founder, Robert Welch, continually castigated prominent Americans such as Dwight Eisenhower for allegedly helping the Communist cause. The press also pointed back to Johnson’s November 1960 visit to Dallas when he and wife Lady Bird were allegedly “hissed at and spit upon,” and a 1963 incident when Adlai Stevenson, then United States ambassador to the United Nations, was hit by a poster brandished by an anti-United Nations picket. Perhaps a bit too early, \textit{Time} magazine ran an article in early November following Stevenson’s visit entitled, ‘Texas: A City Disgraced’. The \textit{Texas Observer} pointed to Dallas Republican Congressman Bruce Alger, who, according to the \textit{Observer}, could vote against social security and the school lunch program, essentially call Democrats pro-communist, denounce the United Nations, and still be returned with a solid majority in every election since 1954. A Midwest newspaper made light of Dallas’s lack of leadership, particularly from the \textit{Dallas Morning News}, which, it believed, accepted and printed malicious advertisements that

permitted a “boiling hate,” and “frontier type of six-shooter justice” to expand. Dallas Judge Sara T. Hughes, who swore in Johnson as president shortly after Kennedy’s assassination, believed “there had been created in Dallas a political atmosphere so highly charged with hatred and potential violence that the assassination of a President fitted the pattern.”

It was easy, therefore, for some network news reporters and commentators to link the shootings of Kennedy and Connally to a right-wing Republican conspiracy nestled in Dallas. Even after the arrest of Lee Harvey Oswald and his affinity toward the Soviet Union and Fidel Castro were reported, the national news media still labeled the motivating factor that inspired Oswald’s deed as a “climate of hate in Dallas” inspired by right-wing extremists. The fact that Dallas gave Nixon a larger majority in 1960 than any other city of more than 200,000 population in the United States lent support to their claim. Moreover, the vindictive mood of the Eastern press was such that it transcended politics. For instance, when the unbeaten Texas Longhorns, ranked Number One by the wire services, defeated Roger Staubach and his Naval Academy teammates in the season-ending Cotton Bowl Classic in Dallas on January 1, 1964, the New York Touchdown Club still voted Navy the 1963 national collegiate football champion. Thus, the cumulative effect was such that it created a pervasive sense of guilt in Dallas that would ultimately set back Republican momentum in a dramatic fashion. Thousands of

moderate-conservatives and ticket splitters who had been so alienated by JFK’s liberal policies and Johnson’s deviousness as to consider defecting to the Republican Party quickly set aside their grievances and realigned themselves with someone from their own state who, because of an assassin’s bullet, had been suddenly thrust into the presidency. Right-wing extremism had not only proved too much for them, but more importantly for those leading the conservative movement, Goldwater, Alger, and Bush, all of whom would pay a heavy price at the polls.17

Amidst all of the negative political ramifications suffered by the Republican Party from Kennedy’s assassination, Goldwater still threw his hat in the ring in January 1964 for the Republican presidential nomination. Promising the Democrats a campaign “dogfight,” Goldwater also stated, “You have to be honest” and admit that the assassination of President Kennedy hurt the Goldwater cause. Responding to questions of why he announced his candidacy, Goldwater referred to Nelson A. Rockefeller, the only other Republican to have declared himself a candidate for the nomination, as someone who did not offer a declaration of conscience or of political position and, therefore, could not possibly offer the American people a clear choice in the next election. When asked what kind of a Republican he was, Goldwater replied by stating that he was not a “me too Republican.” In other words, Goldwater offered “a choice, not an echo.” Goldwater’s words stuck and gave rise to Phyllis Schlafly, then president of the Illinois Federation of Republican Women and a delegate to the forthcoming GOP national convention. She penned a paperback entitled A Choice Not An Echo, which was a stinging attack on secret

Eastern kingmakers whom she alleged had dictated who the GOP candidate for president would be since 1936. Schlafly became a major player in the Goldwater campaign by mobilizing the grass roots to nominate him.\textsuperscript{18}

After taking Illinois, Texas, Indiana, and Nebraska in the Republican presidential primaries, Goldwater all but clinched his nomination when he won California on June 2 by a narrow 51 to 49 percent over Rockefeller. Drawing 75 percent of the vote in Texas’s presidential poll, Goldwater’s victories pumped new life into his campaign, resulting in a record crowd at the Republican state convention in Dallas on June 16, where Goldwater was awarded all 56 Texas delegates to the national convention in San Francisco beginning July 13. Events in San Francisco, however, only further diminished Goldwater’s chances of defeating Johnson in November. After Rockefeller was knocked out of the race, the party’s moderates and liberals turned to Pennsylvania Governor William A. Scranton, who, along with Rockefeller, made a last gasp effort to block Goldwater’s nomination. Scranton charged Goldwater with offending delegates by refusing to condemn right-wing extremism, not supporting Johnson’s civil rights measure, and “nuclear irresponsibility” in his views toward Vietnam while Rockefeller branded the Goldwater-dictated Republican platform “repugnant” and “shocking.” Most hurtful to the conservative cause, however, were Goldwater’s own words following his nomination when he stated, “I would remind you that extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice. And let me remind you also that moderation in the pursuit of justice is no

virtue.” By launching a sharp rebuff against GOP “moderates” and allowing extremism to enter the conversation, Goldwater forced other Republican candidates to back away from their party’s standard bearer, which cost him thousands of votes in other states outside the South. 19

Goldwater’s candidacy encountered another obstacle when a couple of weeks prior to his nomination, President Johnson got through Congress the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlawed segregation in all places of public accommodation and created the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Steeped in their devotion to states’ rights, Deep South leaders denounced it as “federal encroachment of the worst order” while Howard W. Smith, a Democrat Representative from Virginia referred to the measure as “the second invasion of the South by carpetbaggers from the North.” South Carolina Senator Strom Thurmond, the “Dixiecrat” (States Rights) presidential candidate in 1948, reacted more vehemently by switching his allegiance to the Republican Party. In Thurmond’s words the Democratic Party had “forsaken the people to become the party of minority groups, power-hungry union leaders, political bosses, and big businessmen looking for government contracts and favors.” The only southern Democrat senators to vote for it were Ralph Yarborough and Al Gore Sr. of Tennessee while John Tower joined other southerners in a filibuster against it. Although Goldwater’s opposition to the legislation would ensure his winning the Deep South states’ votes of Mississippi (87.1

percent), Alabama (69.5 percent), South Carolina (58.9 percent), Louisiana (56.8 percent), and Georgia (54.1 percent), it did little for him in the “ Peripheral South” or “Rim South” states of Texas, Arkansas, Florida, Tennessee, Virginia, and North Carolina, where there was significantly less Black population, thus fewer Jim Crow enthusiasts. 20

Goldwater’s opposition to the bill, however, cost him plenty of votes, particularly in those areas where his chief Republican opponents, Rockefeller, Scranton, and Henry Cabot Lodge made him out to be an enemy of the Blacks. Moreover, several civil rights leaders linked Goldwater with the staunch racist and segregationist Governor George Wallace of Alabama, who was busy seeking a third party candidacy. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., described Goldwater’s nomination as “disastrous” and urged the nation’s voters to withdraw support from “any Republican candidate that does not publicly disassociate himself from Senator Goldwater and his philosophy.” The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) called Goldwater’s nomination a “tragedy for the Republican Party and for the American nation.” Executive Director of the NAACP Roy Wilkins said that although he did not regard Goldwater as a racist, among his supporters were some of the most outspoken racists in America. The civil rights leaders’ chief quarrel with Goldwater was that he believed the only real and lasting approach to civil rights was one that was promoted on a personal moral appeal led by the states, not by the federal government. Wilkins, however, pointed to the recent melee that Mississippi state officials had allowed

to show why it would take federal intervention. Conversely, in his book *Conscience of a Conservative*, Goldwater clearly spelled out why he thought the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was unconstitutional.²¹

Johnson, on the other hand, had engineered the passage of the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964, and with its passage, he had proved that he could pass major legislation that Kennedy could not, and that he could no longer be tied to the racist Southern past. Still, Johnson realized the potential impact of what had been accomplished when he told a friend following his signing of the bill, “I think we just delivered the South to the Republican Party for a long time to come.” He was partly right: the act hurt the Democratic Party across the region but not enough to take his home state or other “Peripheral” southern states away from him in the presidential election. Johnson’s position on Southeast Asia also favored his election, particularly when his campaign linked Goldwater’s “extremism” to his proposed use of nuclear weapons in Vietnam. Hence, Goldwater was effectively portrayed in a television political add as a warmonger who would bring American military strength to bear decisively in Southeast Asia. The *Texas Observer* declared, “While Senator Goldwater’s call to free men was ringing throughout the land – and free men were hearing and responding, the other side ran television commercials of little girls, daisies, and atom bombs.” Johnson, however, cooed as a big dove, a man of peace while telling Americans, “We are not about to send American boys nine or ten thousand miles away from home to do what Asian boys ought

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to be doing for themselves.’ Thus, it came as no surprise on November 3 when President Johnson, in the greatest presidential landslide since 1936, easily won the nation while defeating Goldwater by twenty-six percentage points in Texas. Kennedy’s assassination and Goldwater ‘extremism’ had indeed taken its toll on the Republican cause in Texas as well as the nation. 22

Nationwide, Johnson pulled most of the big-city Democratic vote and gained heavily from Republican defections, 20 percent according to the Gallup Poll. He won by landslide margins in the traditional battleground states of the North and coasted to easy triumphs in such GOP strongholds as Iowa, Kansas, New Hampshire and Vermont. Although Johnson lost the Deep South states because of his civil rights bill, it was offset by the overwhelming percentage of Negroes’ votes in the Northern cities – 90 percent or higher in some areas. Nationwide, 94 out of every 100 votes cast by Blacks went to Johnson, the most overwhelming majority ever accorded to any presidential candidate by any major population group. Moreover, the normally GOP suburbs surrounding Philadelphia, Chicago, Detroit and other Northern big cities joined in the defection to Johnson’s camp. Thus, Johnson’s contention that there would be a greater backlash against Goldwater extremism at the polls than white resentment against Black integration tactics proved true. In Texas, 238 of 254 counties went to Johnson, leaving only sixteen in the Republican column, which were traditional Republican counties located mostly in the rural and western areas of the state. Most noticeably, however, Johnson won all

eleven of the state’s heaviest populated counties, and the largest of these, Dallas (Dallas), Harris (Houston), and Tarrant (Fort Worth) with sizeable majorities. In Dallas, the original “hotbed” of Texas Republicanism, Johnson won 55 percent of the vote, 60 percent in Houston, and an overwhelming 63 percent in Tarrant County. Moreover, the fact that five of the eleven most populous counties had voted for Nixon in the 1960 presidential election showed that presidential Republicanism, for the time being, was a dead cause in metropolitan Texas. 23

In Texas’s senatorial, gubernatorial, congressional and legislative races, Republicans were washed out as well. Most reminiscent of the traditional one-party system of Texas was the gubernatorial race pitting Republican Jack Crichton against the Democratic incumbent John Connally, whose near martyrdom status made him virtually unbeatable as long as he wished to be governor. Hence, his winning all 254 counties with 74 percent of the total vote came as no surprise as he was the candidate who came nearest to the Texas model of a middle-of-the-road Democrat. In congressional and legislative races, Republicans ran numerous candidates as they had in 1962. They nominated Bill Hayes, who ran unsuccessfully for lieutenant governor in 1962, to oppose the incumbent, Joe Pool, for congressman-at-large and contested all 22 congressional districts in contrast to only 18 in 1962. Not only were they unsuccessful in each race, but the seemingly entrenched Bruce Alger of Dallas’s Fifth District and newly elected Ed Foreman of West Texas’s Sixteenth District were defeated decisively while Joe Pool was re-elected

Democratic Congressman-at-large by a two-to-one margin. In the other congressional districts, the Republican votes were all low except in the Panhandle’s Eighteenth District, where the Democrat Walt Rogers polled only 58,701 votes to Republican Robert Price’s 48,054. 24

Fifteen State Senate seats were up for election in 1964 for which the Republicans nominated only six candidates and polled very small votes except in far West Texas District 29 where Republican S.L. Abbott polled 41,342 votes to the Democrat W.E. Snelson’s 62,823. In the lower house of the state legislature, seventy-five Republicans were nominated, but the electorate sent only one to Austin, Frank Cahoon of District 77, a Republican stronghold in Midland. Republicans were defeated easily in most other races. In Dallas County, where eight representatives were elected in 1962-1963, all were defeated in 1964 as Republicans averaged 105,876 votes to the Democrats 160,366. In Harris County’s twelve seats, Republican candidates averaged 122,528 votes to the Democrats 230,326 with no close races, while in Tarrant County Republicans averaged a dismal 38,378 votes to the Democrats 103,189. In the races for statewide offices, Republican candidates again fared poorly with very meager votes. Amidst the backlash, however, from Kennedy’s assassination, civil rights, and Goldwater extremism, there was a silver lining for the Texas GOP at the polls. In defeat, George H.W. Bush received more votes (1,134,337) than any Republican ever received in Texas – more than

Eisenhower in 1952 or 1956 and more by a whisker than Nixon in 1960, who received 1,325 fewer Texas votes than Bush.\textsuperscript{25}

Although Bush’s numbers were a silver lining, the underlying consolation for Republicans occurred on October 27 when Goldwater’s campaign appeared to be completely out of steam, needing to be reenergized. They received more than what they could have asked when a Hollywood actor who was essentially a no-name in politics delivered a nationally televised speech on behalf of Goldwater that shook the foundations of the Republican establishment. In what came to be known as “The Speech,” Ronald Reagan spoke to a number of conservative principles and ideas more effectively than conservatives had heard since the beginning of Goldwater’s ascendancy. In part, Reagan stated,

\begin{quote}
I have spent most of my life as a Democrat. I recently have seen fit to follow another course . . . You and I are told increasingly we have to choose between a left or right. Well I’d like to suggest there is no such thing as a left or right. There’s only an up or down – [up] man’s old – old aged dream, the ultimate in individual freedom consistent with law and order, or down to the ant heap of totalitarianism. \textsuperscript{26}
\end{quote}

Reagan’s speech, which restructured the belaboring left-right jargon into words of profound meaning, resonated so among Americans that orders and money began pouring into Republican headquarters for copies of the speech. Although Reagan’s speech did not change the polling results, Republicans took heart in knowing that a potential star had


been born. Reagan undoubtedly established himself as a future factor in the Republican equation.\textsuperscript{27}

Although Reagan and Bush loomed large, Texas Republicans’ dream of a two-party system since 1952 had come to an abrupt halt as the state resumed its definite one-party status. Overall, the 1964 election clearly showed that voters favored President Johnson’s “let us continue” theme in a period of general peace and high prosperity over Goldwater’s “stop socialism at home and communism abroad.” In Texas, however, Goldwater’s ultra-conservatism with respect to many issues was simply not acceptable while there were grave doubts about Goldwater’s sound judgment in the conduct of foreign affairs. Second, the fact that Johnson was a native son of Texas who had lived his entire life in the state was an irresistible appeal for most Texans. Third, the expected ‘backlash’ in East Texas over the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 never occurred. Of the fourteen East Texas counties, only three, Smith, Gregg, and Panola voted against Johnson and Yarborough despite their support of civil rights. Perhaps most important, however, was Johnson’s uncanny ability to hold the support of Democrats all the way from conservatives like Allan Shivers to liberals like Ralph Yarborough. This was best exemplified when Johnson “muscled” conservative candidates Lloyd Bentsen and Joe Kilgore out of the 1964 Senate primary where they would face the incumbent Yarborough. Wanting to shore up his relations with the AFL-CIO and realizing that another divisive primary would ensure the election of Bush, Johnson resorted to “strong arm tactics” from Washington to serve the interests of the “most liberal elements” of the

national Democratic Party. Although conservatives reacted vehemently, Johnson still managed to hold the party intact.28

Fortunately for Republicans, however, the party in power was the first to have to confront the nation’s new but growing challenges. Although the fallout from the passage of the civil rights bill presented the Johnson administration a major challenge nationwide, particularly in the Deep South, Texas stood out as one Southern state where the race issue did not dominate politics. V.O. Key, Jr., offered the best explanation of Texas politics in relation to race by first referring to the changes that had occurred in Texas since 1860 when a substantial part of the state’s population consisted of Black slaves and most of its people lived in East Texas. The changes over the nine decades, according to Key, had weakened the heritage of southern traditionalism, revolutionized the economy, and made Texas more western than southern. To emphasize his point, Key stated,

In 1940 only one Texan in seven was a Negro. White Texans, unlike white Mississippians, have little cause to be obsessed about the Negro. The Lone Star State is concerned about money and how to make it, about oil and sulfur and gas, about cattle and dust storms and irrigation, about cotton and banking and Mexicans. 29

Moreover, by 1970, Texas’s Black population made up only 12.5 percent of the state’s total population whereas Mississippi’s Black population consisted of approximately 37 percent of its total. Thus, following the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Republican Party became a viable alternative for a large number of Mississippians and


29 Key, Southern Politics, 254.
other Deep South state’s residents who placed the preservation of racial segregation above all other issues. It did not, however, for as many Texas residents, whose economic concerns trumped those of racial. For instance, in Dallas, civic and business leaders expected “no major racial incidents” following the bill’s signing whereas in heavily Black populated Texarkana anti-integration rallies, according to the Texas Observer, “like the old gray mare, just aint what they used to be.”

With the passage of the Voting Rights Act in August of 1965, however, more conservative Texans began to feel the brunt of the civil rights movement, especially when eight Blacks in ten considered themselves Democrats whereas the proportion considering themselves Republicans was fewer than one in ten. Before the bill’s passage, only 29 percent of eligible African Americans in Texas had registered to vote; afterward, 57.7 percent were registered. In Houston, top labor attorney Chris Dixie attested that the Black voter impact transformed the political climate of Houston “from one world to another.” Before then liberals were fearful of the Minutemen, Minutewomen, and other right wing elements. “Today,” Dixie stated, “no politician in Houston will get up and say anything provocative about race.” Consequently, this newly enfranchised base of minority voters precipitated the migration of more conservative Democrats into the Republican Party; however, the leadership of Johnson and Governor Connally managed to keep the migration from being so massive. Still, it did not keep H.L. Hunt from predicting on

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LIFE LINE that “whites, however free from racial prejudice, will be forced into the Republican Party by the Negro population.” Liberals, meanwhile, rejoiced in knowing that the increased Black vote would substantially increase their numbers.31

Amidst the racial discord and party realignment resulting from his civil rights legislation, President Johnson was still faced with getting the remainder of his “Great Society” program through Congress. This included efforts to end poverty, aid to public education, measures to protect the environment, and medical care for the poor (Medicaid) and elderly (Medicare). Because it represented the greatest burst of domestic reform since the New Deal and billions of dollars in aid to state and local governments, Texas conservatives reacted unfavorably to the Great Society. The Dallas Morning News referred to Johnson’s proposals as “disturbing” and “longer steps toward total federal control and the welfare state,” and wondered “how soon and how strongly the reaction will come.” The Texas Academy of General Practice urged its 1,7000 members not to participate in Medicare while Senator Tower referred to it as inadequate because being under social security it could endanger that system. Opposition to the Great Society even came from Governor Connally, who described the president’s anti-poverty program as a prospective “boondoggle” with “scandal possibilities.” The governor vetoed the Neighborhood Youth Corps project, which the Texas Farmers Union planned to sponsor under President Johnson’s anti-poverty program. Texas conservatives were also appalled

by Johnson calling for a repeal of 14-b of the Taft-Hartley Act, the section under which Texas enacted its right-to-work law. While Connally called repeal of Texas’s “right-to-work” law “wrong,” the San Antonio Express referred to it as “immoral.”  

The billions of dollars poured into the Great Society’s welfare state measures caused many of the state’s traditionally Democratic voters, even those who supported New Deal-style liberalism, to protest by switching their allegiance to the Republicans. And if the growing bureaucracy and staggering costs associated with the Great Society were not enough to push conservatives into the Republican Party, then America’s growing involvement in a war 7,000 miles from the coast of California was. While millions of Americans across the nation were watching the battle for civil rights being shown through their television sets, another battle with greater political repercussions was beginning to evolve in the jungles of Southeast Asia. On July 7, 1964, after securing passage of a Congressional resolution authorizing him to take “all necessary measures to repel any armed attacks against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression” in South Vietnam, Johnson, suddenly launched the nation on a course that would become one of its worst nightmares. Fearing that anything resembling a declaration of war might provoke the Soviet Union and Red China, but more importantly, jeopardize his civil rights and medicare bills, which were at crucial stages in the legislative process, Johnson chose to keep the general public as well as Congress aloof on key decisions. Johnson particularly feared that a Congressional debate on “that bitch of a

war” would destroy “the woman I really loved – the Great Society.” Johnson thus took the nation into war in Vietnam by “indirection and dissimulation.” 33

On February 11, following the National Liberation Front (NLF) attacks on a United States Army barracks at Pleiku and enlisted men’s quarters at Qui Nhon, the Johnson administration initiated “Rolling Thunder,” the first sustained and intensified bombing against North Vietnam. Consequently, anti-American demonstrations erupted around the world while two thousand chanting, sign-carrying demonstrators marched in New York near the United Nations and headquarters of the United States Mission to the United Nations protesting American actions in Vietnam. The expanded air war also provided the pretext for the introduction of the first United States ground forces in Vietnam on March 8, 1964, when two battalions of Marines landed near Danang. In response, The Dallas Morning News ran an article that the Vietnam war was now being fought on a “false premise,” referring to Saigon’s government having lost control of the countryside. Hence, the call of American troops was the “logical and inevitable consequence,” where the United States would eventually assume the main burden of combat against Communist guerillas. Moreover, as the war increased in cost and at the expense of American lives, Johnson found himself caught in the middle of a divisive and angry debate, one that by 1967 had the potential of wrecking his presidency and tearing the nation apart. Occurring at a time when Americans were questioning their values and institutions as at few other periods in their history, Vietnam aroused more widespread and passionate opposition than any other American war. It also occurred in a time of

generational strife when the verities of the Cold War were coming in question. The war thus divided Americans as nothing had since the debate on slavery a century earlier.34

At one extreme were the “hawks,” primarily right-wing Republicans and conservative Democrats, who viewed the conflict in Vietnam as an essential element in the global struggle with Communism. Hawks believed in the “domino theory,” that if one nation fell to Communism it would spread into neighboring countries, and eventually take over all Southeast Asia. Deeply frustrated by the stalemate in Vietnam, the hawks bitterly protested the restraints imposed on the military and demanded that the administration do whatever was necessary to attain victory. “Win or get out.”

Representative Mendel Rivers, a Democrat from South Carolina, advised President Johnson in early 1966. At the other extreme were the “doves,” an extremely fractious group who opposed the war with increasing bitterness and force. One faction of the “doves” included radicals such as Bill Ayers, co-founder of the Weather Underground and Tom Hayden, leader of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Their organizations, riddled with radicals, became part of the “New Left,” which pushed radical ideas beyond original notions. Their attack on American foreign policy was unrelenting, and their organizations eventually became inextricably linked with the cultural revolution that swept the United States in the late 1960s, challenging basic American values and institutions. Antiwar liberals, however, far exceeded the radicals in numbers and challenged the war on legal, moral, and practical grounds. They charged that the use of

such weapons as cluster bombs, herbicides, and napalm violated basic standards of human behavior and that the huge investment in Vietnam was diverting attention from more urgent matters at home. Hence, because of the detrimental effect the Vietnam War had on the Great Society, it would be the anti-war liberals’ protest vote that would to some significant extent leave the Johnson column. 35

Among the anti-war liberals in Texas were many Mexican-Texans who had volunteered for the Great Society, mostly members of League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and the G.I. Forum, who were also frustrated by the siphoning of domestic spending to finance the Vietnam War in addition to their lack of influence on government policies. Liberals were also outraged by the exploitation of Rio Grande Valley farm workers, whom they accompanied on a march to Austin in 1966 to join in the demand for a minimum wage law. When they were met with stiff resistance by Governor Connally and law officials, liberal militancy increased. Conservative Texans, meanwhile, were upset about demonstrations on college campuses and a “no-win” policy in Vietnam. Since Texas had forty-three colleges, this is where the New Left (SDS) sought inroads against racism and the Vietnam War in 1964. By 1967, however, the Vietnam War came to the forefront of the New Left’s protests and activities. At The University of Texas in Austin, where the SDS was the “biggest and best” in the American South, students charged that African Americans and Vietnamese had “the same enemy. . . and economic system – capitalism – which oppresses many so that a few may profit.”

They protested Secretary of State Dean Rusk’s visit to Austin in February and Vice-President Hubert H. Humphrey’s visit in April. Hence, by the mid 1960s, the collective impact of anti-war protests, racial unrest, and expanded government programs had turned the majority of Texas voters against the Johnson administration.36

As the Great Society and Vietnam War continued to divide the country unlike never before along conservative-liberal lines, Texas Republicans sensed that the unprecedented discord could work to their advantage. Adding to that hope was John Tower’s appointment in 1965 to the Senate Armed Services Committee. Because the extent of military/defense activity in Texas was staggering, he would be able to make news on many matters affecting installations in Texas. Throughout the year, therefore, Tower became more prominent as a spokesman for the military and its needs in Vietnam while his role as a filibuster leader to retain the Taft-Hartley right-to-work provision (14.b) boosted his image as well. Hence, Tower’s reelection status moved from “ripe for plucking” by whomever the Democrats might nominate to 46 percent of the state’s voters who wanted him reelection according to the Texas Poll taken in mid-summer 1965. Tower and the Republicans also benefited from the renewed feud between Governor Connally and Ralph Yarborough, which stemmed largely from Yarborough increasing speculation that he would make a fourth run at governor. Outraged at Connally for vetoing one of President Johnson’s anti-poverty programs in Texas, Yarborough accused the governor of

“abuse of power.” Hence, Republicans were hopeful that the feud would restore the once deep crevice in the Texas Democrats’ liberal-conservative divide. 37

Republicans also took heart in knowing that two of their hopefuls from 1964 were gearing up for congressional races – George H.W. Bush in a newly created Houston district and Bob Price, the Pampa rancher, for a rematch against incumbent Walter Rogers for the Panhandle seat. Since Tower, Bush, Price, and a handful running for the legislature represented the only viable candidates for the Republicans, Tower’s campaign was emphasized at the exclusion of a governor’s race. Being in the “hypnotic political power” of Governor Connally, Texas Republicans were faced with either reelecting Tower or losing most of their power in Texas. In other words, someone who agreed to stay in his office would get the Republican nod for governor. Hence, the Republican strategy for the 1966 elections was to reelect Tower with a key element of holding down the Democratic voter turnout by contesting only the most winnable races around the state. This represented a drastic change from 1964 when full slates of candidates were encouraged to run as part of the conservative movement.38

Tower’s opponent in the general election was Texas attorney general Waggoner Carr, a key figure in the conservative Democratic establishment. Although Carr’s gubernatorial ambitions were well-known in Austin, he knew that contesting Connally would be political suicide. Like previous primaries, Republican strategists were hoping


for a divisive Democratic Primary between the conservative Carr and the liberal Congressman Jim Wright of Fort Worth, but Wright’s decision to pull out ended that hope. Carr soon found, however, that the issue of race was working against him because he had attended a 1957 segregationist rally in Houston. Moreover, Tower’s positions on Vietnam and right-to-work were in line with conservative-minded Texans, many of whom were Democrats who had supported Carr in the past. Furthermore, economists were beginning to express concern over Johnson’s policy of escalating the war in Vietnam while enacting many new social welfare programs. Tower, meanwhile, was busy making strong inroads among the Mexican-American population in Texas for his support of military and defense programs, which included better pay for civilians employed on bases. Tower also catered to the Mexican-American leadership by introducing a bill to increase the size of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). The Texas Federation of Republican Women (TFRW), whose membership by December 1965 had grown to almost 5,800 members in 138 clubs, also gave Tower a boost by raising money through “Pink Elephant Projects” such as Pink Elephant dances, tasting teas, rummage sales, and bake sales. Once again, women turned out en masse to support Tower.39

Tower also profited from a major defection that occurred on October 11 when former state Supreme Court judge and Carr’s predecessor as attorney general Will Wilson decided that he no longer had a future in the Democratic Party and endorsed Tower. Wilson then formed a special ad hoc committee, Attorneys for Tower, which included,

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among other noted Texas attorneys, Abner McCall, President of Baylor University. Other ad hoc committees were formed for business and professional groups to sponsor direct mail regarding Tower’s record to their membership. Moreover, the Secretary of State reported Tower’s list of contributors was the longest ever filed in Texas history. Approximately 20,000 Texans had contributed roughly $300,000 to Tower’s campaign, an average of $15 per contribution. Carr, on the other hand, the supposed candidate of the people, received the support of only about 1,500 contributors who averaged some $125 apiece. Carr’s campaign was in such disarray that in October Connally assumed effective control of it by placing his own political lieutenants in its management. Carr the conservative also thought it wise to disassociate himself from labor unions, white-collar liberals, and some minorities. Consequently, the liberal wing of Texas’s Democratic Party, including Senator Yarborough, once again expressed that they preferred a conservative Republican to a conservative Democrat. Just as they had in the Blakley-Tower special election, liberals entertained the idea of “going fishing.” Thus, on November 8, with a much lower than expected voter turnout, Tower upset Carr with 56.7 percent of the vote, or in raw figures, 842,501 votes to Carr’s 641,855.40

Attorney General Carr attributed his defeat to a “fatally light” voter turnout of only 1.5 million and a “nationwide tidal wave of dissatisfaction” with the Democratic Party. Five days after the election, however, Sam Kinch, Sr., veteran political writer for The Fort Worth Star-Telegram, pointed out that Carr’s explanation of low voter turnout

did not hold any water because Connally polled 195,016 more votes than Tower in the
governor’s race. Kinch mainly attributed Carr’s loss to his poorly run campaign and
Democratic defections, which included at least 400,000 Democrats or Independents who
approved of Tower and saw no need to replace him, or those who wanted to speak out
against state or national administrations. In fact, according to Kinch, a larger voter
turnout would have produced an even larger Republican margin. Regardless, the election
held a strikingly similar voting pattern to the 1961 Blakley-Tower election, although this
time it was even more pronounced. For instance, Tower won each of the state’s ten most
populous counties, whereas in 1961 he won only seven. Equally impressive, however, is
that he won Dallas (Dallas) County with 65 percent of the vote, Harris (Houston) County
with 60 percent, and Tarrant (Fort Worth) County with 62 percent. Two surprises
included Jefferson (Beaumont) County – 62 percent, and Travis (Austin) County – 62
percent, followed by Bexar (San Antonio) – 54 percent, and El Paso (El Paso) – 61
percent. The liberal-labor backlash was evident in Jefferson and Travis Counties as well
as the Tower Mexican-American program, which also scored in Bexar and El Paso
Counties. In addition, Tower carried Nueces (Corpus Christi) County and the densely
populated Lower Rio Grande Valley counties of Cameron and Hidalgo (Brownsville,
McAllen, Harlingen) while carrying sixteen counties that had never before voted
Republican.41

41 “Carr Blames Light Turnout, Nationwide Trend for Loss,” Dallas Morning News, Nov. 10,
1966; “Texas Politics: Explanation Too Simple?” Fort Worth Star-Telegram, Nov. 13, 1966; Knaggs, Two-
Party Texas, 103-105; Kingston, Attlesey and Crawford, Texas Almanac’s Political History of Texas, 303;
Overall, there was simply no consolation for Carr, for Tower not only won the ten most populous counties, but all but one of the state’s twenty-five most populous counties but one, McLennan (Waco). Carr even lost his home county of Lubbock decisively, 14,558 to 10,476. Congressional candidates Bush and Price were also part of the Republican comeback. Bush won Houston’s newly created Seventh House district over Democrat Frank Briscoe with more than 57 percent while in the Panhandle Price defeated Democrat Dee Miller by over 59 percent. In defeat, Jim Collins polled 47 percent against the Democrat incumbent Joe Pool for a new Dallas district, but the other GOP congressional candidates did not fare well. In the races for the state legislature, Hank Grover of Houston, a veteran conservative Democrat in the Texas House, changed parties to run for a conservative state senate district created in Harris County by redistricting. Grover became the first Republican in the Texas Senate since 1927 after defeating W.D. Miller by over 20,000 votes. A former GOP member of the Texas House, Ike Harris of Dallas, made a strong bid for the state Senate by polling 49.5 percent against Democrat incumbent George Parkhouse, losing by only 596 votes out of more than 65,000 cast. In the Texas House, Frank Cahoon of Midland, who was easily reelected, received company with the election of two Republicans – Malouf Abraham of Canadian and Chuch Scoggins of Corpus Christi. Abraham won easily with 61 percent and Scoggins, who was defeated in 1964, won with 55 percent of the vote. As much of the story of the Republican comeback, however, happened where there were no GOP victories. For instance, in Harris County seven GOP legislative candidates polled between 44 and 49
percent, and in Dallas County nine Republican legislative candidates polled between 44 and 48 percent. 42

Republicans could also take heart in knowing that the party apparatus was healthy and growing. For instance, the TFRW had grown from 2,000 members in 1955 to 5,800 members by 1966. In 1960, the Texas Young Republicans had only two federated clubs in Texas colleges, but in 1966, there were thirty-four with the University of Texas at Austin club included as the largest in the nation, with 1,300 members. Hence, because these organizations were largely responsible for the efforts at the grass roots level, The Dallas Morning News attributed Tower’s victory in part to an “enthusiastic state Republican organization, composed mostly of young voters.” The greatest reward for the Republicans, however, was seeing the conservative-liberal divide within the Democratic Party begin to reestablish itself after Johnson had skillfully sutured the divisions following the assassination of Kennedy. Thus, because the agenda of the Great Society was anathema for far too many conservative Texans indoctrinated in states’ rights, and the protests arising from the Vietnam War caused many conservatives who had initially supported Johnson to begin to doubt, Republicans were able to reestablish themselves after the fallout of 1964. 43

The electoral tide also looked promising for the Texas GOP outside the state as Republican governors across the nation increased from seventeen to twenty-five.


Republicans broke into the Solid South for the first time since Reconstruction by winning the governorships in Arkansas and Florida. For conservative Texans, the most consequential race was in the state of California, where Ronald Reagan mobilized conservative voters and defeated the Democratic incumbent Pat Brown in a landslide with 57 percent of the vote. An ensuing Texas Poll showed that Reagan would run stronger against Johnson in Texas than leading GOP candidates Nixon or Romney, as well as independent candidate George Wallace. Moreover, by the summer of 1967, as the Vietnam War protests began heating up across college campuses, Texas Republicans were encouraged by the various polling results, which showed that most Americans disapproved of Johnson’s Vietnam Policy. On June 23, an open letter under the heading of “Dissenting Democrats” appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* insisting on peace in Vietnam. Signed by 8,000 Democrats, their goal was to acquire the signature of one million party members across the nation by having a letter in the newspapers of the nation’s 25 largest cities. By September 1967, a mere 36 percent of Texans approved of Johnson’s Vietnam policy while 51 percent disapproved, and the president’s approval rating had dropped to its lowest (47 percent) ever. The root of opposition, according to a poll taken by State Representative O.C. Fisher of San Antonio, was Johnson’s failure to do whatever it took to achieve a decisive military victory while pouring billions of dollars into his Great Society programs.44

In the late summer and early fall of 1967, an unusual number of vacancies occurred in Texas’s legislature due to deaths or resignations, one in the Senate and six in the House. Hence, Republicans sensed that another opportunity had befallen them prior to the 1968 election since these seats would be filled by special elections in November. Moreover, each of the Republican candidates was now in a position where they could ride the coattails of Tower’s amazing success. The first of these to do so was Ike Harris, who had barely lost Dallas’s Eighth Senatorial District seat in the general election, but because of the death of George Parkhouse, the seat was now open. Bruce Alger’s defeat in 1964 made this race especially important for Dallas Republicans, who had been smarting ever since. Luckily for Harris, he faced seventeen opponents on November 11, including one obstinate Republican, which allowed him to come away with 71 percent of the vote. Hence, the state’s Democrats were still clearly divided to the point where they were unable to unify behind a single candidate. 45

Tower’s coattails and Harris’s victory carried over for the Republican candidates vying for Texas House seats as all six made it into runoffs scheduled for December 9. Taking center stage in the runoff was the race between a twenty-seven-year-old Republican attorney Maurice Angly and Rogers Wilson of the ruling Democratic establishment for Travis County’s vacant seat. Once again, the divided Democrats allowed the Republican candidate to force a runoff as Angly was the lone Republican in a


ten-man field in the general election. But the idea of a Republican winning in Johnson’s backyard was almost unfathomable, particularly for someone like Angly, who had essentially been a no-name politically. Angly, however, had the endorsement of the Travis County Political Association of Spanish-Speaking Organizations (PASO) chapter and was the sentimental favorite among much of the local Austin media and Capitol Press Corps, both of whom were anxious to see a Republican break into the capital area legislative delegation. Consequently, on December 9, Angly pulled the upset with 6,912 votes to Wilson’s 5,520, carrying fifty-nine of the county’s eighty-two precincts. Unsurprisingly, the story made national news, with accounts appearing both in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. An article in the *Austin American* the day following the runoff quoted Texas GOP chair Peter O’Donnell saying, “Angly’s victory comes in Lyndon Johnson’s old Congressional district, his seat of power, and is a sign Johnson is losing his grip in Texas.” The article also pointed out that the last Republican elected by Travis County to serve in the Legislature was in 1872. Because the Austin area had always been the core of Democratic strength in Texas, Angly’s victory was yet another indication that the continued stalemate in Vietnam along with the costs of the Great Society were taking their toll on Johnson’s popularity.46

In the other runoffs for the Legislator, Harris County Republicans were jubilant as Edmund E. “Sonny” Jones took District 22, Place 7 with 4,910 votes to his Democratic opponent Ira Kohler’s 4,293, while Glenn Purcell won overwhelmingly against his

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Democratic opponent Bill Wood 12,084 to 6,769. As much rejoicing came, however, when the front page of the *Houston Chronicle* announced on December 6 that Bill Archer, the popular conservative Democrat, announced that he was seeking reelection as a Republican, protesting against the national Democratic policies, which were, according to Archer, “opposite my own.” In the three other Texas House races, however, Republicans were defeated, although they ran credibly. Still, for a party that was fighting for its life in the aftermath of the Kennedy assassination, adding one more to the state Senate and three to the House, in addition to running numerous close races, was a clear sign that the political tide in Texas was turning once again. As the country continued to become more deeply embroiled in protests against the policies of the Johnson administration, what would the future hold for Texas’s Republican Party?  

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By the end of 1967, Texas Republicans had their eyes fastened squarely on the 1968 gubernatorial race because of Governor Connally’s surprising announcement in November that he would not seek reelection. Enjoying the momentum and publicity from the special election victories and close races, plus Bill Archer’s conversion, Republicans, like liberals, saw the best opportunity they ever had for winning a governor’s race. Republicans were encouraged knowing that the liberals could likely win the Democratic primary, especially if Ralph Yarborough decided to give up his Senate seat to run. Early speculation had either Congressman George Bush or Senator John Tower as frontrunners, both of whom had a legitimate chance of winning the statehouse, but speculation was all that it turned out to be. Bush was bent upon unseating the liberal Democratic incumbent senator Ralph Yarborough so that he could become the second Republican senator from Texas, while Tower was busy being courted as a favorite son presidential candidate who was expected to control at least 300 delegate votes to the Republican National Convention. Hence, Republicans ended up uniting behind Paul Eggers, a forty-eight-year-old tax attorney from Wichita Falls, whose only political experience was at the local level as party chairman plus his role on one of the State Republican task forces. Liberals, likewise, were disappointed when their hopeful Senator Yarborough chose not to run;
however, their candidate Don Yarborough had political clout from earlier races. ¹

The first move of the Democratic Establishment people after Connally announced he would not seek reelection was to implore House Speaker Ben Barnes to run for governor. Barnes refused because of his lack of statewide exposure in addition to his youth, which then led the “Connallycrats” to turn to Lieutenant Governor Preston Smith, who, after writing three-hundred letters to leaders of the conservative wing of the party, was beginning to pick up some of the pieces of Connally’s constituency. Other noted Democrats joining Smith in the primary were Uvalde rancher and former state legislator Dolph Briscoe, Waggoner Carr and the remnants of his statewide organization, John Hill, secretary of state under Connally, and the only liberal in the pack, Don Yarborough, who was virtually assured a runoff spot. Although Yarborough defeated Smith in the primary, “Connallycrats” rallied to give Smith a convincing win over Yarborough in the runoff with 55 percent of the vote. Still, liberals put together a respectable showing in spite of the uniting effect that Johnson and Connally had on Texas’s Democratic Party. Eggers, meanwhile, easily won the Republican primary, therefore pitting Smith, the “caretaker of the stagnant one-party system” against Eggers, “the forward-looking conservative offering vigorous new leadership for Texas” in the general election. ²


Because it was a presidential election year, the governor’s race would once again take a back seat to the race for the White House, particularly at a time when America seemed to be coming apart at the seams. As the stalemated Vietnam War grew increasingly unpopular with the American public, it was reflected in President Johnson’s approval rating, which was below 50 percent by the end of the year. Moreover, an October Gallup Poll had Senator Robert F. Kennedy as the frontrunner for the Democratic presidential nomination; however, Republican presidential candidate hopefuls Richard Nixon and Nelson Rockefeller had an extremely slight margin over Kennedy if the election were held then. Although Nixon was the front-runner among the Republican candidates, he clearly presented a dilemma to the Republican Party since he lacked Rockefeller’s appeal among independents and dissident Democrats. Moreover, Nixon’s relation with conservatives was uneasy. “They don’t like me,” Nixon said, “but they tolerate me.” Hence, if California Governor Ronald Reagan became a serious contender for the 1968 nomination, Nixon would face a desperate fight even to hold a portion of his conservative base, particularly in Texas, where a serious split had surfaced in the Republican Party. At one end were the West Texas and Houston faction, led by new Harris County chairman Nancy Palm, also known as “Napalm” for her blistering remarks toward adversaries, and represented publicly by National Committeeman Albert Fay, who supported Governor Reagan. At the other end were Dallas, Fort Worth, and San Antonio Republicans who followed Senator Tower, represented by state chair Peter O’Donnell, and supported Richard Nixon. ³

Although the root of the divisions within the Republicans was over control of the party, which began in 1962 with the election of O’Donnell to the state chairmanship, the potential presidential candidacy of Ronald Reagan was the underlying reason for the divisions at the Corpus Christi state convention in June. Reagan had been the main attraction for Texas Republicans in 1967 and much of 1968 while speaking at various Republican fundraisers across the state. Reagan’s speeches included “hard-hitting” assaults on Robert F. Kennedy, Ted Kennedy, and President Johnson, but in a manner and charm that caused the *Texas Observer* to remark, “This man is no Goldwater.” Reagan’s popularity in Texas also resulted from his befriending conservative Democrats, to whom he referred as “God-fearing and patriotic,” while excusing them as “victims of the leftward tilt of their national party.” He also connected with Texas Democrats by reminding his audiences that he once too had been a Democrat, and that he did not leave the party, but the party left him. Hence, Reagan’s popularity among both Republicans and conservative Democrats posed a dilemma for a number of Texas GOP leaders. Complicating matters further were Texas’s 56 delegates to the Republican national convention, which according to Texas’s top Republican leaders, was split 50-50 between Nixon and Reagan. Since O’Donnell represented the Nixon forces, he exercised his clout at Corpus Christi to keep the delegation committed to backing Senator Tower as a favorite son candidate in order to avoid a convention split. Although O’Donnell’s interview with newsmen at the convention was favorable to Nixon, a resolution for

Reagan and a noisy demonstration lasting ten minutes clearly showed that Republicans were divided. 4

By the end of July when it became apparent that Nixon would receive the Republican nomination, Tower released Texas’s delegates from their favorite son commitment to him, thinking it would put Nixon over the top and thus have some influence on the likely nominee. At the second state convention in September, however, more divisiveness arose because O’Donnell decided to limit funding of all other candidates in order to direct funds to Nixon’s campaign. This was anathema to Nancy Palm, who believed in diligent, disciplined precinct organizations and winning local elections. Moreover, the GOP in Houston, Midland, and the Panhandle had experienced considerable success in congressional, legislative, and local contests by working at the grass roots. Hence, these party workers knew firsthand that the party could be built from the local level upward if the funds for local contests were not compromised for the major campaigns. O’Donnell and his cohorts knew, however, that without control of the executive branch of the federal government, the Republican Party in Texas and elsewhere would be denied the political prize of patronage and other favors to encourage party members. For example, without John Tower in the Senate, the Republicans would hold no statewide elective office, nor be a credible political power in more than a few urban counties. Divisions also arose over the gubernatorial candidacy of Paul Eggers, who had never run for political office, and being from Indiana, was not a Texas native; therefore,

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the “vast majority” of Republicans had never heard of him. When it became evident that neither Bush nor Tower would run for governor, other leading Republicans turned to former Attorney General Will Wilson or former gubernatorial candidate Jack Cox, thus increasing divisions. ⁵

Reagan supporters, meanwhile, persisted up to the national convention in Miami in their efforts to get the California governor nominated, which included the sponsoring of an all-night Reagan movie-marathon on the evening prior to the beginning of the convention. Reagan’s popularity in Miami became the main topic for Texas newspapers. The *Dallas Morning News* consistently ran more stories on Reagan and his supporters than Nixon while an article in the *Austin American* was headlined “Convention Mania Hits With Reagan.” On the convention’s first day, Reagan formally announced his candidacy when he met with the California delegation, and then attempted to sway Texas delegates’ votes. In fact, fifteen delegates ended up casting their vote for Reagan, thinking that it would increase his likelihood of being asked to join the Nixon ticket. For those who did not, the only reason given when asked by reporters was because of Nixon’s experience in foreign affairs. But still etched in the minds of a number of Nixon Republicans was Goldwater’s disaster in 1964, which prevented many of them from risking a “replay” with Reagan. Still, Texas Republicans went to bed the last night of the

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national convention “certain in the minds that Richard Nixon is the man, but knowing in
their hearts that Ronald Reagan is right.”

The divisiveness within Texas’s Republican camp, however, could not compare to
that within the Democrats going into 1968. By 1967, the root of the discord was the
Vietnam War, which was exemplified to the greatest degree thus far in late October when
approximately 200,000 foes of the war gathered in Washington, and 37,000 peace
demonstrators marched from the Lincoln Memorial to the Pentagon with the aim of
“short-circuiting the massive military nerve center.” The demonstrators listened to Dr.
Benjamin Spock, the baby authority and antiwar militant, describe President Johnson as
an “enemy” after being elected as a peace candidate in 1964. Texas House Speaker Ben
Barnes, the Establishment’s lieutenant governor entry, told a Dallas crowd in November
that Johnson’s running for reelection would make it “a difficult election year,” implying,
of course, that the war had made Johnson’s candidacy a liability. Moreover, on January
30, 1968, in the midst of a Vietnamese lunar New Year celebration, the costly and
divisive war in Vietnam reached a climax. At 2:45 A.M., a Communist suicide squad
blasted a hole in the wall surrounding the United States embassy in Saigon. For the next
six hours, the most important symbol of the American presence in Vietnam was the scene
of one of the most dramatic episodes of the war. The attack on the embassy was but a
small part of the Tet Offensive, a massive, coordinated assault against the major urban
areas of South Vietnam. In most other locales, the result was the same: the Communists
were repulsed and incurred heavy losses. The Tet Offensive was unique, however, in that

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6 Cunningham, Cowboy Conservatism, 91-93; “Convention Mania Hits With Reagan,” Austin
the side that won tactically was defeated psychologically and thus politically, particularly after the “hard-sell efforts” of the Johnson administration to demonstrate that the war was being won. 7

A few days before Tet, a government study commission declared that the failure of the United States government to prevent rioting, despair, and threatened anarchy in the nation’s large cities had brought the nation to the brink of its greatest crisis since the Civil War. Hence, Tet exacerbated the already deplorable conditions in American cities because now the rioters and anti-war protestors strengthened their resolve with the chant, “Hey, Hey LBJ, How Many Kids Have You Killed Today?” Perhaps Tet’s greatest impact upon American public opinion occurred during an evening television broadcast on February 27 when noted NBC anchor Walter Cronkite dejectedly told his television audience in his own words that the Vietnam War was no longer winnable. Consequently, a March Gallup Poll found that a majority of both hawks and doves interviewed throughout the country favored a proposal to “phase out” of the Vietnam War, and that an overwhelming majority of Americans (78 percent) were certain that the United States was not making any progress in Vietnam. Hence, the Communists achieved one of their main objectives of the Tet Offensive: To stir up U.S. public demands that U.S. forces get out of Vietnam. Among numerous middle-of-the roaders who had intended to support the

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administration, there was an undercurrent of shock and resentment. “What happened,” demanded one senator, “I thought we were supposed to be winning this war.”⁸

Texas’s reaction to Tet was also vociferous and daunting. Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) at the University of Texas along with other progressive groups staged a massive anti-war protest on February 27 outside the confines of Gregory Gymnasium on the university’s campus. The attendance of President Johnson at the fifty-first birthday celebration of Governor Connally taking place inside the gymnasium provided the perfect occasion. Frank Erwin, chairman of the university’s Board of Regents and Texas’s national Democratic committeeman, told reporters, “When it requires 300 policemen to assure the safety of the President of the United States on a university campus, we should re-examine and determine what this is all about.” Texas Liberal Democrats (TLD) drew up a resolution stating that President Johnson had committed a “grave disservice” to his country and to the democratic form of government by his “manipulation of the mass media,” which had prevented Americans from having a clear and objective appraisal of the Vietnam War. Fagan Dickson, former state assistant attorney general who would challenge J.J. Pickle for President Johnson’s former congressional seat in the Tenth District, headed up “Business Executives Move For Peace,” while campaigning to end the Vietnam War and dissuade the president from seeking another term. Campaigning under the slogan “Bring Lyndon Home,” Dickson

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echoed the sentiments of a number of Texans, including a former University of Texas student, who advocated that Johnson return home and run for governor.  

Johnson’s candidacy for governor was clearly out of the question, but not his returning home. On March 31, knowing that Tet had caused an overwhelming majority of Americans to oppose his Vietnam policies, and in the midst of an economic crisis and unprecedented protests at home, Johnson addressed the nation saying, “I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your President.” Tet even proved to be a political watershed in the president’s home state. On March 31, the *Dallas Morning News* reported that the mood of Texas on the Vietnam War had shifted in the past eighteen months from a desire for all-out victory to a growing doubt that victory could be achieved at all. Mrs. Bill Schotts, an accountant in Corpus Christi, echoed the sentiments of a number of Texans when she told reporters, “I used to think we were right to be in Vietnam,” but “I’m beginning to change my mind. . . Maybe we ought to come home.” A rancher standing outside the Palo Pinto County courthouse put it a bit more bluntly, however, while looking in the sky at the helicopters training at Fort Wolters near Mineral Wells, where the Army trained pilots to fly the “choppers” in Vietnam. “Most of those kids up there are going to Vietnam,” he said, “and a lot of them won’t be coming back. It makes me sick to think about it.” Moreover, after sampling the Houston-

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Galveston-Beaumont area, a *Dallas Morning News* staff writer reported that there was “little question” that Johnson’s impact as a leader was weak. Hence, the unduly optimistic reports of American progress in Vietnam throughout 1967 made the shock of Tet greater than it might otherwise have been; therefore, widening an already large credibility gap between the Johnson administration and Texas voters.  

Still, the political repercussions from Johnson’s announcement were immeasurable because suddenly Democrat Senators Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota and Robert F. Kennedy of New York, and Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey became frontrunners for the Democratic presidential nomination. McCarthy, an outspoken dove, had been hammering away at Johnson’s Vietnam policies for some time before he challenged Johnson’s re-nomination in the New Hampshire primary on March 12. Receiving 42 percent of the vote, McCarthy came within 230 votes of outpolling President Johnson in New Hampshire, which his supporters interpreted as a victory. Early appraisals emphasized that the vote reflected a growing sentiment for peace, and a few days later, Robert F. Kennedy, a more formidable peace candidate entered the field. Kennedy assailed what he called the “disastrous, divisive policies” of the Johnson administration, which initiated one the bitterest disputes the Democratic Party had seen in years between the Johnson and Kennedy wings of the party. Frank Erwin interpreted Kennedy’s candidacy as giving “great encouragement” to the Viet Cong while Senator Tower saw it as further evidence of dissension within the Democratic Party. Humphrey’s candidacy, however, remained the most clouded of the three because of him being the

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staunch defender of Johnson’s Vietnam policies. The Vice President’s candidacy also presented a dilemma for those delegations chosen in state conventions planning on Johnson’s reelection bid. Hence, because the 1968 Democratic presidential nomination was suddenly thrown into chaos by Johnson’s refusal to accept the nomination, Republican presidential hopes increased significantly. 11

In Texas, Johnson’s announcement to not seek reelection hit hard among Democrats, but was welcome by Republicans. Texas’s state Democratic chairman Will Davis described Johnson’s decision as a blow “between the eyes” and a tragedy. Governor Connally said he felt “shock and displeasure” while House Speaker Ben Barnes said he was “shocked” and “surprised.” Texas Republicans, however, saw Johnson’s withdrawal as setting up a “whole new ball game” because they would not have to fight an incumbent. “It is historically hard to unseat an incumbent President,” remarked Albert Fay, national Republican committeeman for Texas, who then stated, “The Democratic nomination is wide open. . . It increases our chances significantly.” Johnson’s decision to withdrawal from the race was also widely interpreted as a confession that his Vietnam policies had failed, which gave momentum to Richard Nixon, whose campaign centered upon “ending the war in Vietnam and winning the peace in the Pacific.” Before Tet, Johnson had a 51 to 42 percent lead over Nixon, according to a nationwide Gallup Poll, but afterward, another poll showed that each would receive 42 percent of the vote. Hence,

the Vietnam War not only brought down the presidency of Lyndon B. Johnson, but would become the decisive issue for the 1968 election. 12

As Democrats began to prepare for the upcoming state and national conventions, they were staring at a chaotic and divisive race for their party’s presidential nomination as well as the third party candidacy of Governor George C. Wallace of Alabama, the ardent segregationist who could be expected to make deep inroads into Southern states.

Wallace’s Texas campaign began on April 25 when his plane landed at Jefferson County Airport, which according to locals, was the biggest event there since Gunsmoke’s James Arness came to town. Wallace told his crowd of about 600 that there was not “ten cents worth of difference” between the presidential candidates of the Democratic and Republican parties, and urged them not to vote in the state’s May 4 primary but instead to attend American Party precinct meetings. Wallace’s entourage flew to other Texas cities, but his last stop in Houston was the most reflective of Texas’s growing support for him. There, he was greeted by 5,500 jubilant citizens singing “Dixie” and waving American and Confederate flags. Consequently, on May 4, more than 88,000 registered voters attended American Party conventions throughout the state, guaranteeing Wallace a place on the Texas ballot in November. Democrats, however, became victims of more unforeseen changes, but this time, of a fatal kind. In early April, civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee, which set off racial riots in cities across the country, and on June 5, Robert F. Kennedy was assassinated in Los Angeles.

Angeles following his victory in the California primary. In the wake of these assassinations, themes of “lawlessness” and a Congress and government “out of touch with the people” became other burdens that the national Democratic Party was forced to bear. 13

With Robert F. Kennedy’s assassination, the upcoming presidential race was “almost certain” to pit Vice-President Humphrey against Richard Nixon since Humphrey had already become the front-runner in the quest for delegates to the national convention. Kennedy, however, had seemed likely to make a contest of it after winning the California primary and by having great popular appeal to the voters, particularly the bloc-voting racial minority groups. Figures from a Gallup Poll showed that Kennedy got 85 to 90 percent of the primary vote in some African American areas. In Texas, there was still antipathy toward Kennedy among the Establishment because of his role in keeping the presidential nomination from Johnson in 1960; however, African-Americans and Mexican-Americans still remembered the concern that JFK projected for minority groups and the impoverished. As one San Antonio liberal leader put it, “Every home on the west side has the Virgin of Guadalupe on the wall and a picture of John Kennedy right next to it.” Moreover, Mexican-Americans and African-Americans decried the fact that proportionally they suffered a much higher percentage of losses in Vietnam than Anglos, who numbered 87 percent of the nation’s population. Hence, being an anti-war candidate would also have benefitted Kennedy. Kennedy’s death, therefore, not only impacted the

presidential race nationally, but locally as well, because if Kennedy had become the Democratic presidential nominee, Wallace would likely have won the popular and electoral votes in several southern states and had a major impact in many non-Southern states. But with Kennedy’s death, Texas’s Humphrey supporters were suddenly pitted against their liberal counterparts who supported peace candidate Senator Eugene McCarthy.  

Most of the state’s conservatives, however, refused to back either Humphrey or McCarthy, and instead backed Governor Connally, who most closely reflected the views of the Democratic establishment. At their June convention in Dallas, Texas Democrats named Connally favorite son candidate with an overwhelming 4 to 1 margin and pledged to operate under the unit rule at the national convention in Chicago beginning August 26. Bound by the unit rule meant the wishes of the majority would decide how Texas’s entire 104 Democratic presidential delegate votes were cast. Knowing, therefore, that the unit rule would end any chance of winning a portion of Texas’s delegate strength to the national convention, Senator McCarthy and his “president for peace” campaign followers, which included mostly intellectual liberals, tried but failed to get a number of county conventions to oppose the unit rule. Moreover, the labor union and racial minority groups, which composed most of the liberal strength in Texas as elsewhere, did not come aboard McCarthy’s campaign, but instead favored Humphrey. Hence, the unit rule

eliminated any chance of Texas helping McCarthy in his presidential bid. Consequently, an overwhelmingly outnumbered group of diehard liberals, who were mostly supporters of Senator McCarthy, walked out of Dallas Memorial Auditorium after the unit rule was adopted. The unit rule also encouraged those Texans who wanted to see Connally as Humphrey’s vice presidential nominee, although Connally had stated earlier that he had no further political aspirations. Still, Connally’s name on the ticket would not guarantee a Democratic victory in Texas because both Humphrey and McCarthy were more liberal than Nixon, and earlier elections indicated that the tide was running to conservative candidates in 1968.  

Although the state conventions for both Republicans and Democrats in Texas ran simultaneously, the Republican national convention in Miami (August 5-8) preceded the Democratic national convention in Chicago (August 26-29), which worked to the GOP’s advantage. After Nixon received the nomination and selected Maryland Governor Spiro Agnew as his running mate, a Gallup Poll showed Nixon over Vice-President Hubert Humphrey, the expected Democratic nominee, by 45 percent to 29 percent. A Nixon-McCarthy poll showed Nixon with 42 percent to McCarthy’s 37, which likely reflected Humphrey being attached to Johnson’s Vietnam policy. Because the Miami convention was not divisive also gave Nixon a post convention surge in the polls. Although Reagan enthusiasts were eventually disappointed in Miami, they were not to the extent of damaging the party. For instance, hours after accepting the Republican nomination,

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Nixon met privately with the Texas leadership, many of whom had backed Reagan at the convention. Nixon not only praised Texas’s uniqueness, but embraced Ronald Reagan as an “icon of western populism.” Hence, Nixon knew that in order to have any chance in Texas, he not only had to win over some conservative Democrats, but Reagan supporters as well. The Republicans chief strategy for doing that was to tag liberalism to the national Democratic Party, and then blame liberalism for the chaos, divisiveness, and lawlessness that was ripping the nation apart. At the Republican state convention, John Tower indicted the National Democratic Party for the unrest in American cities. Tower told the crowd that the reason for the recent violence was people in public life who suggested that “if you find a law you think is unjust, you should break it.” An ensuing resolution was drawn up saying the Democrats had shown “neither the ability nor the inclination” to move against lawlessness of both individuals and groups. 16

The chaos, divisiveness, and lawlessness theme that Nixon and the Republicans attached to the Democrats, however, was underlined by the unpopular Vietnam War. The Republicans’ Vietnam War plank at the Miami convention charged that America’s “heavy involvement in Vietnam” stemmed from a “breach of faith” by the Johnson administration. This was referring, of course, to the Democratic campaign oratory of 1964, which stated, “We are not about to send American boys 9,000 to 10,000 miles away from home to do what Asian boys ought to be doing for themselves.” Militarily, the plank charged that the Johnson administration’s “piecemeal commitment of men and

16 “It’s Nixon On First Ballot,” Fort Worth Star-Telegram, Aug. 8, 1968; Memorandum to the President from Fred Panzer, Aug. 20, 1968 (WHCF, Office Files of Frederick Panzer, Executive-Political, Box 90), Johnson MSS; Cunningham, Cowboy Conservatism, 93; “Towerites Hold Reins,” Dallas Morning News, June 12, 1968.
material” had “wasted” America’s military superiority and “frittered away” its options, resulting in a “prolonged war of attrition.” Politically, the Republicans charged the administration with having “failed to recognize the entirely novel aspects” of the war by overemphasizing its “old-style, conventional tactics,” which had blinded the administration to the fact that the true issue of the war was “the security and loyalty of the population,” not control of the territory. According to Republicans, the Johnson administration had paid inadequate attention to the political framework on which a successful outcome ultimately depended. Hence, the Vietnam War, according to Republicans, was the underlying reason for the social unrest that was gripping the country. 17

While a show of unity and an indictment of the National Democratic Party for the nation’s social unrest provided the Republican Party a significant boost following the Miami convention, the ensuing Democratic national convention (August 26-29) could not have been more divisive and detrimental to the Democrats. Although the Texas Observer predicted a week before the convention that Chicago would almost be a “military-occupied city” in an attempt to prevent or quell any disorder that might erupt at the Democratic national convention, it could not have predicted what was fully in store. On August 29, headlines on the front page of the Dallas Morning News read “Lid on Chicago Blows Sky High.” Torn decisively over the Vietnam War, the Chicago convention turned into an “escalating emergency” defined by “brutality and bloodshed” when 3,000 demonstrators broke through police and National Guard lines Wednesday en route from

the party hotels to the convention center. Members of the Youth International Party (Yippies), the National Mobilization to End the War in Vietnam (Mobes), the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and other protest groups led the massive demonstration. The brutality and lawlessness generated by the protests was such that it actually diverted the brunt of attention from what was going on inside the convention to the mayhem occurring outside, thus jeopardizing any hopes for peace candidate Senators McCarthy and George McGovern of South Dakota, who announced his candidacy only two weeks before the convention. Consequently, Vice President Hubert Humphrey was nominated on the first ballot, which represented a crushing rout of the antiwar forces. 18

Humphrey’s nomination, however, could not overcome the damage that was inflicted upon the Democratic Party from the explosive and divisive convention. Being shown on national television, the Chicago convention suddenly cast a dark cloud on Americans perception of the democratic process, but unfortunately for Democrats, within the frame of their own party. Initial reactions from such well-recognized personalities as Shirley MacLaine and Rosey Grier were that “the Democratic Party is ruined,” while Texas House Speaker Ben Barnes stated, “The Democrats are going to have it hung around their necks.” Members of the Peace Corps Trainees and Staff in California wrote to Vice President Humphrey “utterly dismayed” by the “Gestapo tactics” clearly used both inside and outside the convention hall in Chicago, which repudiated the principles of the democratic process, thus undermining the Peace Corps mission. The rambunctious

convention also elicited floods of telegrams to the White House. In Texas, Lorene J. Mathis, a retired member of the United States Naval Reserve, wrote President Johnson frankly stating, “The Democratic Convention is a disgrace to the citizens of the United States,” while Joe Frank Whitley of Houston wrote that after 62 years he was leaving the Democratic Party because of the Chicago convention, and that “never before” had he been ashamed of being a Texan. Tom Land of Lancaster, a Democrat who had voted for Johnson every time he had run, was appalled by the way the president and Mayor Daley ran the convention. Thus, he told the president that he intended to vote against Hubert Humphrey even “if it’s for a skunk.”

Texans, particularly those attending the convention, were also appalled at Humphrey snubbing Governor Connally for his running mate in favor of Senator Edmund Muskie of Maine, who was thought to be even more liberal in his views than Humphrey. Connally’s primary purpose, however, at Chicago was to ensure that Texas would have a voice in the selection of the party nominee, the vice president, and in writing the party platform. In other words, Connally wanted to see “that the state’s basic political philosophy be expressed,” because Texas no longer had leadership of the sort that John Nance Garner, Sam Rayburn, or President Johnson had provided in the past to ensure Texas’s interests. In fact, Johnson’s presence at the Chicago convention was strongly discouraged. A Wisconsin delegate wrote to the president a week before the convention

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19 Larry Levinson to The President, Aug. 30, 1968 (WHCF, Executive Affairs, Box 79), Johnson MSS; “Connally to Support Democratic Ticket,” Dallas Morning News, Aug. 30, 1968; Peace Corps Trainees and Staff to Hubert H. Humphrey, Sept. 3, 1968 (WHCF, Executive Political Affairs, Box 90), Johnson MSS; Lorene J. Mathis to The President, Aug. 29, 1968, Joe Frank Whitley to The President, Aug. 29, 1968, Tom Land to The President, Aug. 29, 1968 (WHCF, HU Freedoms, Box 65), Johnson MSS.
pleading with him to “not make a personal appearance” at the Chicago convention because of the 1964 Democratic convention’s “peace platform,” and one who promised “no wider war.” Also, because of the inflamed passions that the Vietnam debate would arouse, the Secret Service warned Johnson that his life “might not be safe” in Chicago. Hence, Connally carried the weight of Texas’s interests on his shoulders at Chicago.  

One thing Connally did to ensure Texas’s interests at the Chicago convention was to champion party unison in the hope that controversy at the national level could be avoided. He did this by allowing the pro-Ralph Yarborough liberal element of the party to be represented by a handful of delegates in spite of his earlier feud with Yarborough over the unit rule. Instead of being appreciative, however, Yarborough worked knavishly to overturn the unit rule by gaining the support of George McGovern and Vice President Humphrey to go along with Senator McCarthy. Hence, any chance of Connally becoming Humphrey’s running mate was suddenly dashed. Thus, Connally learned the hard way that he was not only too conservative for Humphrey’s tastes, but also that magnanimity did not always pay off in Texas politics, particularly when there was unremitting bitterness between the two wings of the party. In retrospect, Connally was undermined by the Texas Liberal Democrats acting in collusion with the liberals who dominated the national party, which again showed the underlying reason for the divisions within Texas’s Democratic Party. While the majority of its members still fell under the heading of either conservative or moderate, the remainder was determined to see that their wishes

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adhered to those of the national party. This could not have been better exemplified than when Yarborough used his cunning tactics to gain the support of McGovern and Humphrey against the unit rule, ending Connally’s chances of becoming the vice presidential nominee. 21

The Democratic national convention not only proved to be an indictment against the national Democratic Party before the eyes of the nation, but more importantly for Texas Republicans, another opportunity to gain more conservative Democrats who were outraged by the lawlessness, divisiveness, and spitefulness in Governor Connally’s case, associated with their party in Chicago. “We’re dead in Texas,” said once conservative delegate leaving for home. “Can somebody tell me how a longtime conservative Democrat can make a peaceful transition to the Republicans?” Moreover, a consensus was reached among Dallas Democrats that the convention had created a party image that could not be overcome by November 5. They also bemoaned the presidential nomination of Vice President Humphrey, who although the most conservative candidate, was still a liberal by Dallas standards. Humphrey’s choice of Senator Muskie as his running mate made local Democrats even more pessimistic. Ben Barnes said the ticket’s “only salvation” was that Dallas voters were usually able to distinguish between state and national ticket candidates. The majority of Fort Worth Democrats also showed little enthusiasm for Humphrey’s nomination. “Let’s face it,” one influential party leader said, “Most Texas Democrats are conservatives and Humphrey is far too liberal for their tastes.” Hence, while the Republican national convention provided a boost for the Nixon-

Agnew supporters, the detestable Democratic national convention in Chicago provided an albatross for the Humphrey-Muskie ticket, particularly in Texas, where many conservative Democrats, chapped over Connally being left off the ticket, agreed to not “pound shoe leather” to help the liberal Humphrey carry the state. 22

Following the Democratic national convention, a Texas Poll had 46 percent of those who usually voted Republican enthusiastic over the Nixon-Agnew ticket, while only 28 percent who usually voted Democratic supported a Humphrey-Muskie. Hence, it was clear that not only Humphrey was too liberal for many conservative Texans, but Nixon was as well, which made the third party candidacy of Governor Wallace the all important factor in determining who would win Texas’s twenty-five electoral votes on November 5. Campaigning against “pseudo-intellectuals,” “bureaucratic pinheads,” the Supreme Court, and the “long-haired anarchists” who heckled him from coast to coast, Wallace’s “fire-eating populist rhetoric” captivated the hearts of many southern segregationists and states’ rights enthusiasts throughout the South. In Texas, Wallace was expected to drain away from the Republican ticket many conservative Democrats who found the Humphrey-Muskie ticket too liberal for Establishment politics. Wallace’s message also resonated with a number of voters in heavily Black populated East Texas who had voted for Goldwater in 1964, in addition to ultra-conservatives in Far West Texas. In Odessa, a Republican campaign vice chairman said the Republicans would have a “shoe-in” if it were not for Wallace. Florida’s Republican Governor Claude Kirk

argued that Wallace was in secret collusion with the White House to stage a campaign that would cost the Republicans many votes – those which the Democrats figured they could not get under any circumstances. Moreover, those voters who did not like any of the major party’s candidates were expected to give Wallace their “protest” vote. Hence, even if Wallace could not win Texas, he would certainly determine who would. 23

Nixon, meanwhile, had time to reassess what had gone wrong in 1960, and therefore what needed to be done in order to be successful 1968. Consequently, Nixon and his team of campaign strategists concluded that the party could benefit by reaching out to traditionally Democratic voters – white southerners, Catholics, and working-class ethnics – who rejected many of the social transformations of the 1960s, particularly those associated with the civil rights movement and the anti-Vietnam War movement. This so-called “Southern Strategy” depended primarily on a calculated appeal to white segregationist sentiment. “It was anti-black, not with passion, but with a cool, clear-eyed political cynicism.” Because Nixon’s experience in political office had given him keen insight into even the most subtle aspects of national political life, he clearly understood what had occurred in the region since his 1960 campaign. Seeing his opportunity in 1968, Nixon shrewdly allied himself with Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, the former Dixiecrat who had switched to the Republican Party in 1964. According to Reg Murphy and Hal Gulliver of the Atlanta Constitution, Nixon and Thurmond sat in an

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Atlanta motel room in the early spring of 1968 and struck a deal that if Nixon was elected president, he would find a way to “ease up” on the federal pressures forcing school desegregation, or any other kind of desegregation. Consequently, the deal paid off not only in Republican convention delegates, but Thurmond would also stump the South vigorously for Nixon in 1968. 24

Because law and order became even more of a burning issue for Americans following the Chicago convention, Nixon made it one of the focal points of his campaign by blaming the Democrats for failing to address the rising crime rates in the nation and obstructing law enforcement. Nixon portrayed Humphrey as being more concerned with the “rights of the guilty” than with the “rights of the victim.” In Texas, Nixon effectively exploited the law and order theme by referring to the state’s strong opposition to gun control, warning that liberal measures for gun control could lead to an autocratic state. Nixon also resonated with conservative Texans by linking America’s failures in Vietnam to “antiwar protests” and lawlessness, “government interference with the rights of citizens,” and “bureaucratic inefficiency” at home. Nixon’s campaign received another boost in early October when former Governor Allen Shivers headed up a national committee “Democrats for Nixon-Agnew,” which marked the fourth time that Shivers had supported a Republican for president. Noted members included James Byrnes, former governor of South Carolina, secretary of state, United States Senator, and Supreme Court Justice; former Governor Robert Kennon of Louisiana, and former

Oklahoma Governor Raymond Gary. Noted Texans included Mrs. Dan Moody, wife of the former Texas Governor; Martin Dies, Sr. of Lufkin, former chairman of the House Un-American Activities Committee; Claud Gilmer, former Texas House Speaker, and Dr. Clifford B. Jones of Lubbock, president emeritus of Texas Tech. By forming the committee, Shivers resuscitated the term “presidential Republican” from Eisenhower’s victories in 1952 and 1956, because he knew that Humphrey was too liberal for Establishment Democrats. Hence, he told reporters that Nixon was “superior to rival candidates” and that he offered the “only real hope” for preserving fiscal integrity and responsibility in America’s government.  

After the Democrats nominated Vice President Humphrey for the president, party leaders worked diligently to heal the political wounds that were inflicted in Chicago. Even after his undermining in Chicago, Connally, the good soldier, was among a handful of Democrats who endorsed and organized the Humphrey campaign in Texas, which was the only serious effort organized by Democrats on behalf of Humphrey in the South. In fact, it was Connally’s efforts that kept Humphrey afloat in Texas during the early months of the campaign. President Johnson also did what he could to gain the support of Texas Democrats for Humphrey; however, by mid-September, the nationally renowned columnist Drew Pearson had printed a story for the Washington Post and other leading newspapers across the country citing Johnson as the underlying reason for the party’s divisiveness at Chicago. According to Pearson’s account, although Johnson was sitting at

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his ranch in Texas during the convention, he was more interested in seeing the
vindication of his Vietnam policy than the election of Hubert Humphrey in November.
From Texas, Johnson worked through his operatives at the convention to see that the
party’s Vietnam plank conformed to his views, and not those on the task force
representing Senator McCarthy or Vice President Humphrey. Although Johnson’s
initiatives were passed by a slim margin, 1567 to 1041, they set off a bitter debate, which
according to Pearson, underlined the convention’s divisiveness. Hence, by the time of the
campaign, Texas Democrats began to further realize that although Johnson was
supporting Humphrey, he was not like him, which exacerbated their existing dilemma. 26

The dichotomy between Johnson and Humphrey became more pronounced on
September 30 when Humphrey began publicly criticizing Johnson’s handling of Vietnam
and announced that he would stop the bombing of Vietnam if the communists would help
restore the demilitarized zone between North and South Vietnam. Having alienated a
number of friends and political allies by supporting Johnson’s Vietnam policy, Humphrey
eventually distinguished himself by “going dove,” and therefore gained the endorsement
of Senator McCarthy, who was still smarting from his defeat for the presidential
nomination. During a campaign trip in Houston, Humphrey discussed his proposed “de-
Americanization” of the war, which provoked letters to the editor linking Humphrey to
“northeastern liberalism” and the “antiwar crowd.” Humphrey’s new position on Vietnam
may have won him back old friends and allies, but it caused further problems for him in
Texas, where a majority of conservatives still had a “hawkish” attitude toward the war,

26 Olien, From Token to Triumph, 214; Cunningham, Cowboy Conservatism, 86-87; Tom Johnson
to The President, Sept. 2, 1968 (WHCF, Political Affairs, Box 79), Johnson MSS.
which easily headed the list of the nation’s top problems. In Houston, Humphrey also
bypassed the issue of law and order, which had resonated fervently with most
conservative Texans. This miscue was compounded when Humphrey invited singer
Frank Sinatra to appear with him at a Houston fundraiser. Will Wilson, former state
Supreme Court justice and attorney general, reacted by referencing Sinatra’s “widely
publicized” association with the Mafia hierarchy, which, according to Wilson, “casts
doubt once again on the vice president’s judgment on the depth of the law and order
problem today.” 27

By late October, a Gallup Poll had Nixon with a comfortable lead of 44 percent to
Humphrey’s 36 and Wallace’s 15 percent. But, in the one-month period between late
September and late October, Humphrey had managed to cut Nixon’s lead from 15 to 8
percentage points. Humphrey’s numbers improved as he continued to remind voters that
it was the Democratic administrations which had pressed for and won civil rights laws,
war on poverty programs, Medicare and Social Security increases. In spite of not having
entered any of the primaries and securing the nomination at the national convention,
many Democrats began to see Humphrey as someone who really wanted to be president.
This caused one Democratic wag to remark, “If Humphrey isn’t careful, we could wind
up inheriting this mess we’ve made.” Nixon, on the other hand, continued to capitalize
upon the law and order issue, but also claimed that he had superior experience to handle

27 “Connally to Support Democratic Ticket,” Dallas Morning News, Aug. 30, 1968; Cunningham,
Cowboy Conservatism, 86-87; “Humphrey announces that he would halt the bombing of North Vietnam,”
the years of crisis ahead. “I trained eight years under General Eisenhower,” Nixon said. “He (Humphrey) trained four year under Lyndon Johnson.” While the Eisenhower years were marked by “peace and tranquility at home and abroad,” Nixon continued, the last four years had been noted by a “bitter war abroad, a soaring crime rate, repeated violence and continued inflation.” He then concluded, “You don’t want four more years of that.”

Nixon concluded right because he won the presidency by carrying thirty-two states to Humphrey’s thirteen, and received 301 electoral votes to Humphrey’s 191. According to the popular vote, however, Nixon squeaked by with 43.4 to 42.7 percent. As expected, Wallace carried the Deep South States except for South Carolina, where Senator Thurmond’s campaigning paid off, but Wallace also carried just one “Rim South” state, Arkansas, where race was not as prevalent of an issue. Humphrey, however, proved the majority of political prognosticators wrong who had Nixon winning Texas. The day after the election, the Texas Election Bureau had Humphrey with a 41 percent plurality compared to Nixon’s 40 percent, and Wallace’s 19. Hence, a number of things can be concluded from Humphrey winning Texas, the only victory for the Democrats in the South. First and foremost, the candidacy of Wallace accounted for Humphrey’s victory. Although Wallace won only 19 percent of the vote in Texas, it represented 584,269 voters, many of whom would have supported Nixon had Wallace not run. The one percent margin of victory for Humphrey over Nixon represented a difference of less than 39,000 votes. The Houston Chronicle reported the day after the election that “right

wing conservatives hurt Nixon by going to Wallace,” while many traditional Democrats who had threatened to desert to Wallace “finally returned to the fold.” Thus, Wallace’s candidacy was the underlying factor for Humphrey’s victory in Texas. 29

Political analysts also agreed that with Wallace’s candidacy, Humphrey’s fate in Texas was in the hands of the state’s minority groups. Hence, the second most important factor in Humphrey’s victory in Texas was the Black and Mexican-American vote, which turned out in “overwhelming margins” for the Democratic nominee. For instance, in South Texas, the Mexican-American vote gave Humphrey a 58,000 lead, and in San Antonio, the Mexican-American vote was far better than it had been for Kennedy in 1960, while Nixon received only 6 percent of that vote. In Houston, Humphrey drew 97 percent of the Black vote while Nixon drew only 1.6 percent. Union voters were another group that influenced Humphrey’s victory over Nixon in Texas. For instance, Humphrey ran well in the East Texas counties where there were large numbers of industrial workers, which supported the claim of union labor leaders that they had talked most of the rank and file out of supporting Wallace. Moreover, a Dallas labor leader projected a few days before the election that Humphrey had about 60 percent of the union vote, Wallace 35 percent, and Nixon only 5. Perhaps the third most important factor in Humphrey winning Texas was the last-gasp effort on behalf of President Johnson. Four days before the election, Johnson halted the bombing of Vietnam, and two days before he called for party unity and support of the Vice President at a giant rally in Houston’s Astrodome with

Humphrey at his side. Many observers felt that Johnson’s plea at the Astrodome helped recapture those Democrats who had been leaning toward Wallace. Hence, for Texas Republicans, the results of the state’s presidential race could be summed up best by what many of them realized at the Miami convention: “Richard Nixon is the man . . . but Ronald Reagan is Right.” Nixon miscalculated Texas by aiming at the “big middle” of the state’s vote, which sent far too many conservatives into Wallace’s camp. 30

Conservatism also proved to be the underlying factor in the governor’s race where Paul Eggers, in spite of being deprived of campaign money, turned his contest against Preston Smith into a race toward the end. Smith, however, was not going to let a liberal national party “drown a conservative Democrat” running for Texas governor. Having been raised on a Dawson County farm near Lamesa in West Texas, Smith fit the bill of a true Texas conservative. After leaving the family farm at age fifteen, Smith pulled cotton bolls, plowed, cut yards, and ran a filling station where he fixed flat tires for 15 cents each, or, in Smith’s words, “anything to get an education.” Smith then attended Texas Tech University, and afterwards branched out into real estate and then politics. Smith described himself as an “ultracconservative,” and his legislative record during his eighteen years in state office confirmed his claim. Smith focused upon his experience throughout the campaign in order to exploit the inexperience of his opponent. He told El Paso voters that Texas had achieved greatness because of “experienced leaders” dedicated to serving

their state, so therefore Texans must make certain that “responsible, experienced, and progressive government” continue in Texas.  

Eggers, who was a Wichita Falls tax attorney, was completely unknown to most Texas voters when he was tapped to run for governor. A graduate of the University of Texas law school, he had served as campaign chairman of Wichita County, John Tower’s home, and director of the North Texas Oil and Gas Association. Ironically, Eggers, the Republican, who had strong ties to the oil and gas industry, was the more moderate of the two candidates. Although he called himself an “honest conservative,” he did not contradict liberals who discerned “left-of-center ideas” in some of his speeches. Because of running to the left of Smith, Eggers received the endorsement of PASO and the Ripon Society, which represented many of the views of the progressive wing of the national Republican Party. Eggers also earned the endorsement of the liberal Texas Observer, which continued its strategy to make Texas a two-party state. In spite of Eggers’ inroads, however, financing him proved a problem. For instance, after Nixon received the GOP nomination and looked like a winner, many of the state’s conservative Democrats began pumping money into Republican campaign accounts, earmarked for Nixon because the Democrats liked Preston Smith. When Eggers’ campaign began picking up, however, some big Democratic donors worried that he might have a chance, and threatened to drop Nixon and go to Wallace if the state Republican Party did not “cool” Eggers. Consequently, Republican leaders met secretly and agreed to cut Eggers’ campaign

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budget and began stressing to the Democratic donors that no funds donated to Nixon would go to Eggers.  

In spite of campaign finance complications, Eggers attracted a “considerable portion” of liberal Democrats seeking to push Texas toward a two-party state; however, it was not enough to overcome other minority voters and conservatives who knew that Smith represented their brand of conservatism. Consequently, Smith tallied 1,662,019 votes to Eggers’ 1,254,333, or 57 percent to 43 percent, which was mostly reflected in the rural counties of Texas, where the vote was “high and highly Democratic.” Smith also received 71 percent of the state’s Black vote to Eggers’ 29 percent. In South and Central Texas, Smith had a 2-1 lead in AFL-CIO, Black and Mexican-American areas because of straight-ticket voting encouraged by Democratic campaign aides. In defeat, however, Eggers received 26,000 more votes in Texas than Nixon, and set a new record for Republican vote-getting in the state, 80,000 more than George Bush received in his defeat to Yarborough in the 1964 Senate race. Eggers also carried two of the four most populous counties, Harris and Dallas, and lost Tarrant by a mere 372 votes. The best example of the impact of the liberals’ strategy was in Jefferson County (Beaumont-Port Arthur) where the labor vote was predominant. There, Eggers surprisingly outpolled Smith 37,777 to 34,683.  


In the 1968 congressional and legislative races, Texas Republicans were also handed a shut out by the Democrats, although their three congressional seats (George Bush, Jim Collins, and Bob Price) were retained, along with two state Senate seats and eight seats in the Texas House. Thus, the only bright spots for the Texas GOP were Paul Eggers setting a new record for vote-getting in the state, and, of course, Nixon winning the presidency. Nixon’s victory brought back to Texas Republicans that “great big rock candy mountain” known as federal patronage, something they had become unfamiliar with after being out of power for eight years, but they knew was vital in order to grow the party. Still, in spite of the aforementioned reasons for Democrats’ success in 1968, Texas Republicans were faced with the question of why they did not fare better in the election in the aftermath of Vietnam (Tet) and Chicago. First, because of a native son president and the popularity of Governor Connally, the political climate in Texas remained much milder on the issues of race, Vietnam (Tet), and the Chicago convention than other southern states. Also, in regard to the Vietnam War, Texas’s military industrial complex had vaulted to second, only behind California, in defense work by 1968. By that time eight of the nation’s ten largest contractors were located in the greater Dallas-Fort Worth area. Bell Helicopter in Fort Worth was the leading maker of helicopters for Vietnam. The General Dynamic plant in Fort Worth was grossing $1,800,000,000.00 on the nearly 500 F-111’s it was making, while Ling-Temco-Vought in Dallas was grossing $1,500,000,000.00 for the people in the Dallas area in return for producing 1,400 A-7A
combat airplanes. Hence, Texas’s economy profited heavily from the Vietnam War, therefore quieting much antiwar rhetoric. 34

A lack of antiwar rhetoric in Texas in 1968 can also be attributed to the state’s “anti-communist, anti-liberal, conservative heritage,” therefore causing many conservatives to take a “hawkish” stand on the Vietnam War. Speaking to a Houston crowd in 1967, William F. Buckley, founder of the conservative political magazine *National Review* effectively tied liberalism, communism, and antiwar activism to the national Democratic Party. Another pressing question for Republicans was if Reagan’s candidacy would have made a difference. Because Nixon aimed for the “big middle” of the Texas vote, he posed a dilemma for many conservative voters. By advocating a “fairly moderate” stand on just about everything, Nixon did not fit the bill of what truly defined conservatism in Texas; therefore alienating a number of would-be conservative supporters. This not only included Republicans, but Democrats and Independents as well, many of whom migrated to Wallace’s camp. Thus, Nixon’s early campaign statement to reporters referencing conservatives that “They don’t like me, but they tolerate me,” played out in Texas, but unfortunately the emphasis was on “They don’t like me.”

Without any presidential coattails or gubernatorial for that matter, it became even more difficult for Republican candidates running for the legislature or seeking local offices. 

Discussions of the 1968 election in Texas also have to include the state’s continuing and

Texas’s conservative Democrats handed liberals in their party and Republicans another defeat in the 1970 midterm elections. In the two big races, Paul Eggers was once again defeated by Preston Smith for governor, although by a smaller margin than in 1968, and Representative George H.W. Bush was defeated in his bid for Ralph Yarborough’s Senate seat. Bush’s initial hopes for unseating the liberal Yarborough were severely upset when former Congressman Lloyd Bentsen, Jr. of McAllen upset Ralph Yarborough in a bitter primary battle where Bentsen exploited Yarborough’s outspoken opposition to the Vietnam War. Suddenly, Bush was staring at an opponent who mirrored himself. Like Bush, Bentsen was a combat pilot in World War II, a successful businessman living in Houston, and had served in Congress. Moreover, neither candidate had liberal credentials or strong liberal support, which prompted the Texas Press to view the Bush-Bentsen race as a “Tweedle Dum – Tweedle Dee choice.” Although there was no official party registration in Texas, conservative Democrats easily outnumbered their counterparts in the Republican Party two-to-one, which proved too high a hurdle for Bush. Consequently, Bentsen defeated Bush with 53 percent of the vote. In other races, there were no wins in congressional races or for the state senate. In the Texas House, Republicans picked up four seats in Harris County and one in Dallas. Thus, after twenty-five years of rising liberalism in the national Democratic Party and its divisive impact at home, the Republican Party was offered great opportunities for success in Texas, but by

1970 the party still held only one of Texas’s Senate seats, three in the United States House of Representatives, two in the state Senate and eight in the Texas House. Texas liberals, on the other hand, could take consolation in electing the first liberal majority, 17-14, to the Texas Senate, which kept their hopes alive in their endeavors to gain control of the state Democratic Party. 36

Many felt that Republicans had lost their best hopes of ever helping get the state to two-party status with the resounding defeats of Bush and Eggers. Being the second loss for each of the candidates for a statewide office, neither of them was expected to run again. Hence, the outlook for Texas’s Republican Party heading into the New Year was bleak after the so called “double-barreled” defeat. Within a couple of months after the 1970 election, however, Republicans received the break they had long needed when scandal rocked the state Democratic Party. In January 1971, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) announced an investigation of several state officials and businessmen who allegedly profited from illegal manipulation of stock transitions in what came to be known as the Sharpstown stock fraud scandal. Frank Sharp, for whom the scandal was named, was a Houston financier who controlled the National Banker’s Life Insurance Company and the Sharpstown State Bank. Sharp, who emerged as the major figure in the probe, allegedly sold stock in his life insurance company to several prominent Democrats with money acquired by unsecured loans. Among others, Governor Preston Smith, State Democratic Chair Dr. Elmer Baum, a number of state legislators, Texas House Speaker

Gus Mutscher, Mutscher’s aides, and his father all reaped benefits from Sharp’s deal. According to the plan, these insurance company stockholders sold their shares to a Jesuit organization, which had accepted Sharp’s financial advice and purchased the stock at inflated prices. Ironically, while Smith and Baum netted more than $50,000 each, Mutscher eventually lost $322,250 in the fraud. As the scandal unfolded, Attorney General Waggoner Carr, Lieutenant Governor Ben Barnes, and State Treasurer Jesse James became implicated because they also had established questionable business connections with Sharp. Within one year of the investigation, Sharpstown emerged as one of the Texas Republicans’ greatest assets. Not wanting to be identified with a political party known for scandal, many Texas Democrats had more reason to cross party lines. 37

A Texas Poll taken in March of 1971 asking how much the state’s top political leaders had been hurt by the recent fraud scandal showed that Governor Smith and House Speaker Mutscher had “suffered substantially.” This was revealed in the Democratic primary of 1972, when Governor Preston Smith and Ben Barnes lost out in the gubernatorial nomination to Dolph Briscoe, a wealthy West Texan rancher-banker and former legislator who had run unsuccessfully for the nomination four years before. Corpus Christi Representative Frances “Sissy” Farenthold, a member of the “Dirty Thirty” reform group in the Texas House, ran second with a strong liberal, black, and Mexican-American support. Both Briscoe, who won the nomination in a runoff with Farenthold, and “Sissy” were out of the main stream of Texas politics. An editorial in the

Dallas Times Herald a day before the primary reiterated the impact of the political fallout from Sharpstown: “Texans have become more aware than ever before of the need for quality in public office at all levels.” Although what the primary meant for the Democrats in the November election was hard to predict, all signs indicated that the divisions in the primaries would not be healed by the November general election.  

Another unsettling factor on the horizon for Texas Democrats was the rise of La Raza Unida (The United Race), a militant Mexican-American movement led by Jose Angel Gutierrez of Crystal City, in South Texas. Filing for party status in 1970, it began its quest to bring greater economic, social, and political self-determination to Mexican-Americans in the state. After holding its state convention in October 1971, this movement had developed into a formidable political party that would field statewide candidates. This was a potential threat for liberal Democrats in their party primary, where “nominally loyal votes would be siphoned off,” and for conservative Democrats in the general election, who might see thousands of usually straight-ticket Democratic voters “answer the ethnic call.” During the gubernatorial contest of 1970, liberal Democrat Albert Pena, a commissioner of Bexar County, shifted to La Raza Unida and declined to endorse either Smith or Eggers. Pena did claim, however, that a Republican governor would be no worse than Governor Smith for the Mexicanos: “When you’re sleeping on the floor, you can’t fall off the bed,” remarked Pena. Political forecasting became even more complex when Ramsey Muniz, an articulate attorney and onetime Baylor football star, became the

party’s gubernatorial candidate in 1972. Although being untested in running for his first statewide office, Muniz’s popularity would easily make inroads beyond the “narrow base” of ethnic loyalty. 39

Texas Republicans also smiled by the summer of 1972 when the Democrats nominated Senator George McGovern of South Dakota for president. McGovern’s “doctrinaire liberalism” was anathema in most parts of Texas, and his antiwar rhetoric was still too fresh in the minds of conservative Texans. Ironically, the anti-McGovern forces in Texas were led by Dolph Briscoe, the Democrats nominee for governor. At the Democratic national convention in Miami Beach, Briscoe played a key role in the anti-McGovern movement among the Texas delegation. Briscoe cast his first vote for Governor Wallace and then switched to McGovern on the second “in the interest of party harmony.” The switch by Briscoe and others still left McGovern with 54 votes, Wallace 48, with the remaining votes sparsely divided. Briscoe’s opposition to McGovern increased when the presidential nominee named Missouri Senator Thomas Eagleton as his running mate. After being informed that Eagleton was “even more far out than McGovern,” Briscoe declared that McGovern acted “stupidly and arrogantly.” Thus, Briscoe predicted that the McGovern-Eagleton ticket would “leave a large percentage of the Democratic Party in Texas without representation,” referring, of course, to the thousands of conservative Democrats in Texas. Congressman Jim Wright of Fort Worth

echoed the sentiments of Briscoe when he described Texas as a “lost state” as far as the Democratic Party is concerned in November. 40

Although in a wheelchair after the assassination attempt on him in May, Wallace made a gallant effort to change the Democrats’ liberal, dovish platform, and encouraged Texans at the convention to join him in an intensive campaign to wrest control of the national Democratic Party from “limousine liberals,” who, according to Wallace, never had any “real interest” in the poor. Establishment Democrats were afraid that McGovern’s candidacy would have a “reverse” coattails effect in Texas – that he would drive conservative Democrats into the Republican column on the ballot. As a result, Texas’s Democratic Senate nominee Harold “Barefoot” Sanders, a moderate who would run against Senator Tower, and Briscoe avoided appearing with McGovern on the stump in Texas. Hence, the liberal and antiwar McGovern could not have been more out of step with mainstream Texas, which caused many of them to follow the lead of Texans for Tower Chairman Edward Clark, who had been a lifelong Texas Democrat. McGovern’s calls for “weak national defense, forced busing of school children, and massive welfare handouts” convinced Clark that McGovern was too radical for mainstream Texas. Hence, he made a “fundamental decision” and switched parties to support Nixon and Tower,

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whom he believed stood for sound principles of government. “McGovern is out of step with most Texans,” Clark wrote. 41

Republicans, meanwhile, were busy with a gubernatorial primary runoff of their own, which included six candidates, but then came down to two Houstonians: Albert B. Fay, former national committeeman, and Henry C. Grover, a current state senator. Fay, who was fifty-eight and obviously well known among Republicans, ran on his business background of thirty five years in ranching, manufacturing, farming and the oil and gas industry, while hoping to get many of the state’s rural Democrats to cross party lines. Grover, on the other hand, campaigned on the mere fact that he had never lost a political campaign while Fay had never won one. Grover, a high school history and government teacher for 13 years, was elected to the state House of Representatives as a conservative Democrat in 1960 before switching parties to run for the state Senate. Surprising to many Republican Party leaders, Grover defeated Fay 37,244 votes statewide, compared with 19,760 for Fay, or two-thirds of the vote, and was determined to make a strong bid for governor. 42

In the general election, Briscoe’s candidacy presented an uphill battle for Grover, who had hoped to benefit by running on an “oust the radicals platform,” thus tying Briscoe to the national party. Grover quickly learned, however, that Briscoe was far from radical. He also ruffled the feathers of many party leaders when he made reference to not

41 “McGovern Faces Problem of Unity,” Dallas Morning News, July 13, 1972; “Wallace Greets Texans, Raps ‘Limousine Liberals’,” Dallas Morning News, July 13, 1968; Olien, From Token to Triumph, 231; Edward Clark to Fellow Texans, no date (Campaign/Political File, Box 805, Folder 8), JTP MSS.

having a “more competent, qualified” gubernatorial candidate in the last two races than Paul Eggers, and charged that the “country club” Republicans were not interested in electing a governor, but only a token candidate. Grover also alleged without proof that most of Briscoe’s work had been spent “supervising wetback laborers on his South Texas ranch.” Rather than retaliate, however, Briscoe calmly cultivated the courthouse regulars whom he knew he needed to turn out the vote for him. In spite of being aided by the popularity of two Republicans seeking re-election, Nixon and Tower, Grover could not overcome the challenges of a strong conservative Democrat and a formidable third party candidate. In the final statewide count, Briscoe tallied 1,633,493 votes to Grover’s 1,533,986, and 214,118 for Ramsey Muniz. Garnering only 48 percent of the state vote, Briscoe became the first Democratic governor since 1894 to win with less than a majority. Still, Grover’s votes eclipsed those of Eggers in 1970 and 1968. Grover’s receiving 45 percent of the vote not only showed that the Sharpstown scandal had caused the defeat of an incumbent governor, but nearly allowed a Republican to break a century-long Democratic hold on the governorship. Hence, Briscoe’s strategy of avoiding McGovern on the campaign trail paid dividends, particularly with Muniz receiving 7 percent of the vote. 43

In spite of Grover’s close race, the defining moment for Texas Republicans in the 1972 election was Nixon’s crushing victory over George McGovern in the state as well as nation. Nixon became the first GOP presidential candidate to carry Texas since

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Eisenhower in 1956 by taking two-thirds of the vote, which actually surpassed Lyndon Johnson’s 1964 high mark by nearly 3 percent. Nationwide, McGovern fared a little better with 38 percent to Nixon’s 61 percent. In addition to Sharpstown and McGovern’s candidacy, Nixon’s landslide victory in Texas as well as the nation was a result of effectively cutting into the Mexican-American vote. Nixon had made an active effort to woo the Mexican-American vote by appointing 51 Spanish-speaking persons to high administration positions and by pouring an estimated $47 million into Spanish-speaking projects. Across the nation, CBS found that the Nixon-Agnew ticket had received 55 percent of the Spanish-speaking vote. In South Texas, Nixon drew in excess of 60 percent in some counties, but in Dallas County, he failed to do as well. Still, compared to four years ago when Nixon received only 10 percent of Texas’s Mexican-American vote in his race against Hubert Humphrey, and 15 percent in 1960 against Kennedy, it marked a significant turnaround. 44

Nixon’s turnaround with Mexican-Americans could primarily be attributed to Senator Tower’s efforts at courting the Mexican-American vote, which had paid off for him particularly well in 1966, when they gave him 25 percent of the vote against Waggoner Carr. By 1972, because of Tower, organizations such as Mexican American Republics of Texas (MART) and Tejanos por Tower began giving disgruntled Latino voters an outlet, whose “machine controlled” vote had been taken for granted for years by Texas Democratic politicians. Democrats, according to Tower’s Latin American Advisory Program, had been guilty of relegating Latin Americans to “second-class

citizenship” and letting their “different cultural background” be a hindrance to their assimilation into the mainstream of the American way of life. Hence, Tower once again garnered the strong support of Mexican-America voters, who gave him over 50 percent of their vote in some South Texas counties. Like Nixon and Eggers, Tower was also the beneficiary of Sharpstown and McGovern, who, according to Edward Clark, provided Tower’s opponent “Barefoot” Sanders $2,000.00 thru his henchman Ramsey Clark. Hence, Tower ended up defeating Sanders with 53.4 percent of the vote. Another statewide race, however, that drew a significant amount of attention was that for State Treasurer, where Maurice Angly, the young Republican Travis County Representative who had created fireworks with his special election victory in 1967, challenged sixty-eight year old Democrat Jesse James, who had held the office since 1941. Effectively linking James to the Sharpstown scandal, Angly came within three percentage points of unseating the longtime incumbent. Angly’s race, like those of both Tower and Grover, had a Raza Unida candidate. 45

In addition to the encouraging outcomes in three statewide races, Republicans were also encouraged by the race for Dallas’s Fifth Congressional District, where Alan Steelman, a former executive director of the President’s Advisory Council to the Office of Minority and Business Enterprise, waged a “low-budget shoe-leather” effort against Earle Cabell, the Democratic incumbent. Cabell was Dallas’s mayor at the time of the

Kennedy assassination, and was the one who defeated Bruce Alger in 1964, ending the political career of the conservative Republican. In his campaign, Steelman effectively exploited the Trinity River Canal Project, which had become the hot political topic for Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex residents in 1972. The project can be traced back to Lyndon Johnson’s presidency when he authorized $1.6 billion to transform the Trinity River into a major canal, so that Dallas could compete with Houston for trade and shipping in and out of the Gulf of Mexico. Where Cabell courted the old established moneyed and business classes, who stood to profit from the canal’s construction, Steelman spoke to the northern suburbanites, whose numbers were increasing by leaps and bounds during this time, and whom Steelman saw as having much to lose. Steelman effectively argued that the project would be outdated once DFW International Airport was completed, and that Dallasites would be strapped with an additional $150 million property tax hike for the initial phase of the project, in addition to the crime and pollution that it would bring to the area. Thus, campaigning against the “billion dollar ditch,” Steelman upset Cabell with 56 percent of the vote. 46

Republican success was also seen in races for the Texas legislature, where redistricting in some instances helped Republican candidates. In the Senate, House member Walter Mengden defeated two of his colleagues en route to winning the state senate seat in Harris County vacated by Henry Grover, and in Fort Worth, Republican candidate Betty Andujar, who ran in order to “repair some of the damage” from Sharpstown, became the first ever Republican woman in the state Senate when she

46 Olien, From Token to Triumph, 233; Cunningham, Cowboy Conservatism, 131-32.
defeated State Representative Mike Moncrief. Andujar would become a key player for the Republicans while serving as state senator. Also of particular interest was a race for a Dallas senate seat, where Republican Ken Keeth lost to Democratic incumbent Ron Clover by only 664 votes. Still, Republicans had increased their numbers in the state Senate to three. Breakthroughs in the Texas House were particularly gratifying to Texas Republicans. In Bejar County, Republicans Jim Nowlin, a converted Democrat, and Joe Sage, a retired Air Force colonel won close races to give Bexar County Republicans their first state representatives in modern history. Moreover, Dallas County picked up seven seats in the Texas House of Representatives, while Harris County increased its delegation with five new members, which included the first Republican woman House member, Kay Bailey. Although there were no Republican wins in Tarrant County, it was clear that Republicans were running closer races. Still, Republican gains in the House brought the total to seventeen, a record thus far. 47

Thus, the 1972 election in Texas may have been influenced by the rise of La Raza Unida, Tejanor por Tower, redistricting and continued efforts on behalf of the TFRW, which had grown to 6,132 members in 1972, making it the largest federation in the South and the fourteenth largest in the nation. This, however, could not compare to the impact of the Sharpstown scandal or the candidacy of George McGovern. The day following the election, the Dallas Morning News attributed Democratic losses to a “scandal swept state

47 Olien, From Token to Triumph, 233; Betty Andujar, Interview with Kristi T. Strickland, Sept. 10, 1993, OH 964 (University Archives, Willis Library, University of North Texas, Denton, Texas), 15; Knaggs, Two-Party Texas, 175; “Dallas Goes Big for GOP,” Dallas Morning News, Nov. 8, 1972; Texas Secretary of State, Elections Division, General Elections for State Senate and State Representative, 1972 (Texas State Library and Archives, Austin, Texas); Strickland, “Significance and Impact,” 204.
government,” making light of the fact that newly elected Governor Briscoe, Lieutenant Governor Bill Hobby, Attorney General John Hill, and House Speaker-apparent Price Daniel, Jr. would replace politicians connected in one way or another either to Sharpstown or another scandal. Also, in a sample telegram from John Tower to 150 past key Republican officials, Tower stated that it was obvious from the poll that “scandal, nepotism, and mishandling of state funds” were the reasons that Maurice Angly came within three percentage points of unseating Jesse James for State Treasurer. Regarding McGovern’s candidacy, Dallas County Democratic Chairman Earl Luna attributed the suffering of the Democratic ticket in Texas to “the albatross of the national ticket around the local candidates’ neck.” There was no doubt in the minds of many political observers that political journalist Theodore White’s summation of national politics applied to Texas: “The election was decided the day McGovern was nominated. The question after that was only how much. McGovern did to his party what Goldwater had.” In Texas, however, it was even more so. Hence, for Republicans, never before had political developments seemed more promising, but for a party that was accustomed to experiencing one calamity after another, for how long could this possibly last? 48

48 Ibid., 202-03; “State Dumps Oldtimers,” Dallas Morning News, Nov. 8, 1972; Sample Text of a Telegram To Be Sent from Senator Tower to 150 Past Republican Keys, Oct. 15, 1975, Box 879, Folder 6, JTP MSS; “Optimism Gloom Cover Local Races,” Dallas Morning News, Nov. 8, 1972; Olien, From Token to Triumph, 232.
CHAPTER 6
WATERGATE AND ANTIFEMINISM

On January 22, 1973, former President Lyndon B. Johnson died, and approximately three months later on May 3, Democratic Party stalwart John Connally switched his allegiance to the Republican Party. Generating a huge amount of publicity, Connally’s move proved to be another momentum builder for the Republicans, but it also raised further questions regarding the direction the National Democratic Party was heading. Justifying his decision, Connally described the Democratic Party as fragmented and said that it had moved “so far to the left that it had left the majority of the American people.” Anne Armstrong, White House counselor to Nixon, remarked that Connally and other “new Republicans” crossed party lines because the consistent conservative nature of the GOP better aligned with their political philosophy than “the increasing leftist philosophy of the National Democratic Party.” Dallas State legislator Fred Agnich, who succeeded O’Donnell as national committeeman, forecast that other Texans would follow Connally’s example, which included a number of current and former officeholders who were currently Democrats. Texas’s liberal Democrats, on the other hand, hoped that the “tens of thousands of other Republicans who have voted in our Democratic Primary elections. . . while flying the flag of the Democratic Party,” would follow Connally. Former Senator Ralph Yarborough, Connally’s longtime bitter foe, remarked, “It’s the
first time in recorded history that a rat swam towards a sinking ship.”  

Although Connally’s switch may have given another boost to Texas Republicans and liberal Democrats, it was overshadowed by the dark cloud of Watergate. Republicans across Texas and the rest of the nation could not have foreseen that the triumphant reelection of Nixon would be followed in little more than six months by a scandal of overwhelming proportions. While the details of Watergate began to unfold and public reaction mounted, Nixon’s relation to the national Republican Party changed from an “overwhelming asset to a crushing liability.” As John Mitchell, H.R. Haldeman, John Erlichman, and other officials in the Nixon administration were taken from the Ervin Committee to John Sirica’s federal court, public confidence in the Republican Party quickly faded. Consequently, when Texas Republican Party leaders set out to recruit candidates for the 1974 election, there were few takers. For instance, George Bush and new party chair Ray Hutchinson declined to challenge Briscoe for governor, while Henry Grover, who had fared so well in the 1972 gubernatorial race, withdrew his candidacy in March because of the ominous cloud of Watergate. This left party leaders with the awkward task of finding another viable candidate, but they settled on Jim Granberry, the forty-one-year-old former mayor of Lubbock who was little known outside his hometown. Democrats, meanwhile, easily agreed upon Dolph Briscoe to remain as their standard bearer. In the campaign, Granberry established himself as the leading

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spokesman for the right-to-work provision in the Texas Constitution, which was being threatened by lawmakers in Austin; however it proved insignificant when compared to the enormity of Watergate. Consequently, Briscoe stopped campaigning in October and retired to his ranch outside Uvalde to await the election returns. In an election which a mere 18 percent of the American people dared admit they were Republican and only one in three eligible voters cast a ballot, Briscoe was returned to office by a two-to-one margin, but this time for a four-year term mandated by legislation passed in 1972. 

Watergate also hurt the Republicans in a couple of congressional races. In the Panhandle, incumbent Bob Price, who served four terms in Congress, lost his congressional seat to the popular State Senator Jack Hightower from Vernon. In South Texas’s Twenty-first District, Democrat Robert Krueger defeated Republican Robert Harlan, who had garnered 43 percent of the vote in 1972, running against O.C. Fisher, the sixteen-term incumbent. Because Harlan’s showing was the best ever against Fisher, it forced the elderly congressman to retire rather than risk losing to Harlan in 1974. Hence, Harlan was the early favorite to win before the arrival of Watergate. While the Republicans continued to be plagued by the demoralizing impact of Watergate, however, another development was shaping up in the form of the anti-feminist movement. The anti-feminist movement in Texas would not only soften the impact of Watergate, but also allow Texas Republicans to effectively continue their drive toward a two-party state. Hence, by the 1970s, the backlash from the feminist movement in Texas had become the

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underlying social issue encouraging conservative Democrats to switch to the Republican Party, thus helping precipitate Texas’s transformation to two-party state. In the aftermath of one of the most divisive Supreme Court rulings (Roe v. Wade, 1973) in the country’s history and firmly embedded in a fight against pro-feminist agitators, the Republican Party stood primed to make unprecedented gains between 1974 and 1978, culminating in the first election of a governor from its own party since the Reconstruction era.  

In 1972, after nearly a fifty-year struggle, the United States Congress gave many American women new life when it passed the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the Constitution, which stated, “Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.” First introduced in Congress in 1923 by Republican Senator Charles Curtis through the efforts of Alice Paul, the militant feminist leader of the National Women’s Party, the amendment was defeated by pro-labor Democrats in the Senate, who, in addition to many others, believed it would undermine legislation protecting female workers. The amendment gained momentum in 1940 when the GOP became the first major party to endorse ERA four years before the Democrats. Although support for the ERA extended across party lines when introduced in Congress in 1947, opposition immediately arose to the proposed amendment from conservative women’s groups.  

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After failing to garner the support of the House in 1950 because of a controversial rider amendment, the emergence of a new women’s movement in the mid 1960s imparted new life to the ERA. In her book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Betty Friedan was among the first to claim that the status of women had steadily declined since the ratification of the twentieth amendment in 1920. According to Friedan, increasing numbers of women had subscribed to a “mystique of feminine fulfillment” centered on husbands, homes, and families, thereby, being exploited as a ‘domestic drudge’ and a ‘pretty toy’ rather than obtaining professional fulfillment of their own. With the proceeds from *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan founded the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966, whose mission statement declared “that women . . . are human beings, who, like all other people in our society, must have the chance to develop their fullest potential.” The following year, NOW issued its Bill of Rights, which outlined the general demands of feminism, including effective laws banning sexual discrimination in employment, maternity leave rights, tax deductions for child care for working parents, federally supported child-care centers, equal educational and job-training opportunities, and the right of women to control their reproductive lives. The National Organization of Women also voted overwhelmingly to endorse the ERA. Thus, with the formation of NOW, the modern women’s movement had an institutional base.5

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NOW was the first of several new activist feminist groups including Women’s Equality Action League (WEAL, 1968) and the National Women’s Political Caucus (NWPC, 1971) formed in the late 1960s and early 1970s to combat sex discrimination in all spheres of American life—social, political, economic, and psychological. The emergence of NOW, however, and its affiliates placed severe pressures upon older women’s organizations such as the League of Women Voters (LWV), the American Association of University Women (AAUW), and the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) to become identified with the fight against sex discrimination, which caused them to fear being labeled “feminist” and “militant.” Moreover, NOW and its affiliates represented only one strand of the feminist movement which also included a radical element composed of younger women from a lower occupational status who were more likely to be unmarried. Rather than seeking to eliminate sex discrimination through the traditional channels of legislative and judicial reform, these radical or “second wave” feminists resorted to zap actions, protests, guerilla theater skits, and speak-outs to achieve their radical vision of a new society with nonhierarchical, egalitarian organizations, and unconventional life styles, hence, initiating the women’s liberation movement. Unable to achieve significant gains on their own, however, during the late sixties and early seventies, the “second wave” feminists coalesced with NOW so that by 1972 women’s rights and the ERA had become synonymous with the women’s liberation movement. Thus, by linking women’s rights to abortion and welcoming “second wave” feminists, NOW had not only laid the foundation for what would later come to a head in the Supreme Court case of *Roe v. Wade* (1973), but it had also provided a haven for a radical
group of women, both of which would ignite anti-ERA forces and strike at the very foundations of an America built upon Judeo-Christian values.⁶

Carrying the banner for women’s liberation, Friedan and other feminists allied with America’s Left and soon gained unprecedented influence in the Democratic Party, although the Republican Party was still home to a number of feminists. By the mid-1970s feminists had acquired an association with the Democrats primarily because of the party’s tradition. According to feminist historian Jo Freeman, who had explored the contrasts in party cultures, Democrats were traditionally comfortable with the concept of politics as a coalition of competing interest groups and could therefore allow second-wave feminists into the party even when they did not fully agree with them. The Democratic Party gave feminists a hearing in the 1970s because they could claim to represent American women. The culture of the Republican Party, however, was one that had historically “discouraged expressions of group concerns,” thus leaving little opportunity for GOP feminists to make appeals to gender identity. In the GOP, political connections were more important than constituencies. Women earned the right to be heard not as representatives of women, but as allies of those currently in power.⁷

The Republican Party’s relation to the feminist movement, however, was primarily dictated by the “New Right” coalition, that emerged from Nixon’s “Southern Strategy” in the late sixties. In addition to luring the traditional Democratic voters who


⁷ Critchlow, Phyllis Schlafly, 15; Rymph, Republican Women, 210-11.
rejected many of the social transformations of the 1960s, the “Southern Strategy” also moved those in the party’s Goldwater-Reagan wing to mix conservative positions on race, religion, family, and gender into a “New Right” coalition. Therefore, after the ERA passed both houses of Congress on March 22, 1972, and later sent to the states for ratification, the consciousness of the “New Right” was awakened. The passage of the ERA posed a direct threat to social conservatives of the New Right, who adhered to a fundamental interpretation of the Bible and promoted traditional roles for men and women as the foundation of a stable society. Moreover, on January 22, 1973, when the U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling in Roe v. Wade overturned a Texas law over one hundred years old by legalizing abortion within the first trimester of a pregnancy, the influence of social conservatives grew as opposition to feminism became one of its battle cries. Thus, for antifeminists, Roe v. Wade and the ERA were fundamentally linked because they were both endorsed by feminists and threatened the traditional notion of family stability.8

Under the umbrella of the New Right, anti-feminist groups began to proliferate. Within the first year after its passage by Congress, the ERA was ratified by thirty states; therefore, only eight more states were needed for ratification. ERA appeared headed for speedy ratification when Phyllis Schlafly, a staunch Republican conservative from Illinois, organized the STOP ERA movement in September 1972. Schlafly, a Missouri native, had worked for the GOP for many years; she made an unsuccessful bid for the U.S. Congress in 1952. In 1964, she authored A Choice Not an Echo, which endorsed the

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presidential campaign of ultra-conservative Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater. Since 1963, Schlafly gained prominence and a following because of her active opposition to the women’s liberation movement. After nearly wresting control of the National Federation of Republican Women (NFRW) away from its pro-feminist president Gladys O’Donnell at its biennial convention in May 1967, Schlafly, three months later, began a monthly newsletter of her opinions on current news, the *Phyllis Schlafly Report*. Schlafly, like so many other Americans, viewed ERA as an attack upon traditional Christian culture, whose values were being threatened by the secular Left. Moreover, Schlafly, a mother of six children, realized that the goals of ERA supporters were no longer solely confined to better employment opportunities, equal pay for equal work, appointments to high position, and gaining more admission to medical schools. But now, according to Schlafly, the “libbers” wanted to sugar coat with “sweet syrup” an agenda that was “anti-family, anti-children, and pro-abortion.”  

Schlafly took the lead in rallying the festering opposition to ERA when she published, “What’s Wrong with ‘Equal Rights’ for Women?” in the *Phyllis Schlafly Report* in February 1972. She argued that the family was the “basic unit of society,” which was ingrained in the laws and customs of America’s Judeo-Christian civilization and was the “greatest single achievement” in the history of women’s rights, because the family she argued, assured a woman the most precious and important right of all— the right to keep her own child and be supported and protected in the enjoyment of watching that child grow and develop. This was a direct challenge to feminist Betty Friedan, who

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had argued in her bestselling book, *The Feminist Mystique* that American women had been taught to accept the traditional, middle-class gender roles of homemakers and housewives, and that kept them from pursuing self-fulfillment in the workplace. But of equal concern to Schlafly and her allies were the many undesirable implications of the ERA if passed, particularly unisex toilets, women being drafted, and homosexual marriages, all of which were provided for under Section II of the ERA, which stated, “The Congress shall have the power to enforce by appropriate legislation the provisions of this article.”

When presented earlier to Congress in 1970, however, Section II of the ERA read, “The Congress AND the several states shall have the power, WITHIN THEIR RESPECTIVE JURISDICTIONS, to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.” Therefore, by removing state power or legislation to the federal level, every state would also give up its power to make legislative decisions in the fields of family support laws, co-ed dormitories, unisex schools, co-ed prisons, adoption of children by gays, temporary alimony laws, sodomy and other sex crimes, and regulations and abortions. Washington State Senator Jack Metcalf wrote to the members of the Texas Senate in February 1973 stating, “I believe this grant of exclusive federal power is a move in the wrong direction,” and that not since 1913 had there been such a constitutional grant of power by the states to the federal level, which, according to Metcalf, could be “massive and far-reaching.”

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11 Jack Metcalf to Texas Senate, Feb. 27, 1973, Committee to Restore Women’s Rights (CRWR) to Andujar, Jan. 15,1975, File 272 Box 21-2, Betty Andujar Papers, (Manuscripts Division, University of Texas Arlington, Arlington, Texas [hereafter cited as Andujar MSS]).
Schlaflly’s outspoken opposition to the ERA resonated firmly among many Texas’s many social conservatives, whose lawmakers made it the eighth state to ratify the ERA by a count of 133 to 9 in the House and a Voice Vote in the Senate on March 30, 1972. This occurred only eight days following its passage in Washington D.C. Coincident with the Texas Equal Legal Rights Amendment (ELRA) and the Equal Employment Opportunity Act, both of which Texans easily passed, the quick ratification of the ERA by the legislature drew the ire of many conservative Texans, who, like Schlafly, were aware that it had been ratified without any hearings or committee action or without any substantive consideration or debate among the states early to ratify. Schlafly boldly declared, “It was given no more thought or time than if a legislator had stood up in Chamber and said: I love women, I move that we all give three cheers for the ladies. Who, but a clod, could fail to respond, ‘Rah, Rah, Rah.’” When the average state legislator, according to Schlafly, was confronted by the ERA, he reasoned that if Congress passed ERA by lopsided majorities, who was he to get out on a limb with a negative vote? State representative Courtney Roberts (R) of Arlington did not believe that the ramifications, particularly the legal effects on wives, mothers, and heirs, were discussed enough at the time of the ERA’s passage.12

Although STOP ERA and its newsletter Eagle Forum did not take root in Texas until later, strong opposition to the ERA began in 1974 when two ad hoc groups emerged:

Women Who Want to Be Women (WWWW) and the Committee to Restore Women’s Rights (CRWR). The W’s, as WWWW came to be known, were a Fort Worth based group of Church of Christ women led by Lottie Beth Hobbs, author of half a dozen Bible study texts, including *Daughters of Eve* and *You Can Be Beautiful with the Beauty of Holiness*. With only 150 members in 1974, by November of 1975, the W’s had ten Dallas area chapters and had “shaken off its grassroots in Texas” and had become “organized and chartered” nationally according to the *Dallas Morning News*. Hobbs was convinced that the majority of women and men in the United States would not want the ERA to go into law but did not know enough about it, pro or con, to make a decision. She told a Fort Worth crowd that “we do not think the majority of people in our nation (which was founded on the law of God) want this. Any time we legalize that which violates the law of God, we are on our way down.” As early as October 1974, the growing strength of the W’s was being felt as Wilma Comfort, Executive Secretary of the pro-ERA Texas’ Business and Professional Women, wrote the national director that they were getting “quite a bit of static” from the W’s and “needed help as soon as possible.”

The Committee to Restore Women’s Rights, headquartered in San Antonio and led by Mrs. Bob Edmondson, took the lead in explaining the federal laws already giving rights to women: Civil Rights Act of 1964; Equal Pay Act of 1963; Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972; Educational Amendments of 1972; Comprehensive Employment Training Act of 1973, but most importantly for Texas women, the Marital

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Property Act of 1967. Furthermore, the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments to the constitution provided women protection as citizens. State Representative Bill Clark (R) of Tyler, a graduate of Baylor Law School, echoed the sentiments of (CRWR) when he told downtown members of Texas’s Business and Professional Women that there was “nothing in ERA that could not be done otherwise” and that it had been “highly misrepresented” to them. Edmondson also assured State Senator Betty Andujar (R) of Fort Worth that those opposed to ERA were “not a squawking minority” who had become hysterical over groundless fears, but rather a “large majority of Texans” who had the legal opinions of noted Constitutional authorities upon which to base their objections.14

Leading the charge against abortion was the San Antonio Arch-Diocesan Council of Catholic Women with approximately 500,000 members. One of their chief concerns, according to council president Mrs. Robert Menconi, was that the ERA would finalize abortion on demand. Menconi also was afraid that the amendment would fragment the Christian home, change the family structure, and put women in competition with men. “Our opposition to the ERA does not mean we are opposed to equal legal rights for women, only that we are opposed to this amendment as a means of obtaining them,” Menconi said. Council members also called on the Texas Legislature to rescind its ratification of the amendment. Other Texas organizations strongly opposed to ERA included: Texas Farm Bureau, Alliance for Women’s Advancement (AWARE), Rights

14 Committee to Restore Women’s Rights (CRWR) to Andujar, Jan. 15, 1975, Mrs. Edmondson to Andujar, Jan. 16, 1975, file 272, Box 21-2, Andujar MSS; “Representative Opposes ERA”, Tyler Courier Times, Oct. 20, 1974, Box 35, “ERA” TB&PW MSS.
and Equality, Concerned Citizens of Texas, Texas Daughters of the American Revolution, Texas Right to Life, and the Texas State Parent-Teacher Association, which boasted a membership of over 600,000. TPTA voted overwhelmingly for a resolution asking that the ERA in Texas be revoked, believing it would force boys and girls to use the same restrooms and locker rooms.¹⁵

Facilitating the rise of anti-feminist groups in Texas was the state’s uniqueness. Not quite southern, not quite Southwest, Texas is a state unto itself. It has the unique experience among states of having been its own republic, with its own founders and its own founding myth. Consequently, this distinctive history has produced a level of individualism, and to a certain extent provincialism, that characterizes the culture of Texas even today. Moreover, Texas is a “highly religious” state dominated by Protestant religious traditionalism, though there is a substantial Catholic population. Ideologically and politically, it has been a bastion of conservatism, regardless of partisanship. One noted demographic study in 2000 showed that 25 percent of Texans were Roman Catholic, while fully one-third of Texans were affiliated with the Baptist Church. But another third were said to identify with some other Protestant denomination. Consequently, the number of religious denominations that embrace the state’s religious traditionalism produces a strong conservative bent to Texas’ political culture. Therefore, after the controversial implications of ERA were realized and Roe v. Wade was decided, one of the strongest anti-feminist movements emerged in Texas. Abortion, anti-family,

and non-traditional lifestyles provided the anathema against which a majority of the state’s Catholics and Protestants could easily unite since both religious groups ardently espoused pro-family values. More importantly, these issues raised the question of whether the normally Democratic Catholic vote as well as that of socially conservative Democrats who were Protestant would be so scorned to vote differently. 16

The sheer gravity of the feminist movement also significantly contributed to the mounting opposition in Texas. That the “New Right” focused on feminism, not communism or race, was in itself a testament to the strength and standing of the women’s movement in the 1970s. Feminist scholar Rosalind Pollack Petchesky believed that the women’s liberation movement in the 1970s had become the most dynamic force for social change in the country, the one most directly threatening not only to conservative values and interest, but also to significant groups whose “way of life” was being challenged by ideas of sexual liberation. Lottie Beth Hobbs also realized the magnitude of what was at stake when she stated, “This is the first time our country has been divided into two very distinct philosophical camps that are challenging the very moral fiber of this country.” Essentially, two camps were divided between those who wanted to undermine the traditional sex role system and those who wanted to preserve the existing gender roles prescribed in the mantra of family, home, and motherhood. Therefore, for conservative Texans, the “New Right” had suddenly become defined as the “Religious

Right.” No single issue had before united religious opposition in Texas to the degree that the feminist movement had. 17

Substantiating the views of Texas’ anti-feminist coalition were the efforts of such men and women as Bill Gothard, Tim Timmons, and Susan Key. Gothard first spoke to sixty-five people in a conference room of the Republic National Bank building in Dallas in 1969 on the “doctrine of submission” based upon the teachings found in the Book of Ephesians 5: 22-23. By 1974, Gothard was drawing over 20,000 to various convention centers throughout the state which were being booked up to one month in advance. Gothard discerned that the chief difference between the “libbers”, as he referred to the feminists, and the anti-feminists was a fundamental religious belief: anti-feminists believed in submission while feminists did not. Tim Timmons, a Dallas Theological Seminary student who was inspired by Gothard, soon began a ministry of his own, “God’s game plan for family living,” also based upon the doctrine of submission. Like Gothard and Timmons, Susan Key, the architect of “Eve Reborn,” also focused upon the biblical teachings of submission. She began her seminars at the Highland Park United Methodist Church in Dallas and soon had to begin teaching in other places as she garnered thousands of listeners. Key’s listeners would be given loose leaf notebooks for her seminar and considered “alumni” once they finished her course. Each of these gifted speakers had a profound impact upon the anti-feminist movement in Texas and other

parts of the nation as well. Moreover, in 1974, *The Total Woman*, based upon biblical teachings for the family, became the largest selling hardback in the United States. 18

As opposition to the feminist movement mounted in Texas, cries for rescinding the ERA rang louder. Although hearings to rescind the state’s passage of the amendment did not get under way until 1975, efforts to do so began as early as 1973. On March 19, The Public Affairs Luncheon Club of Dallas drew up a resolution recommending reconsideration and full debate of the amendment and urged Dallas County legislators to vote against ratification if or when it was presented for reconsideration. State Senator Betty Andujar (R) of Fort Worth told WWWW in September of 1974 that “we will take another look. There is quite a counter-move to rescind it...because of growing requests, I would take another look at it.” The most convincing evidence, however, to support the growing opposition to the feminist movement in Texas were the accounts of the girls working two toll-free watts lines in Governor Dolph Briscoe’s office. Averaging about one call per minute all day long, and mostly about the ERA, one of the switchboard operators told a press reporter that about 98 percent of the callers were against it. The increasing strength of Texas’ “Religious Right” had become a force with which pro-feminists had not planned to reckon. 19

The first indication that the anti-feminist message in Texas was making a difference politically came in the 1974 mid-term elections following Richard Nixon’s

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resignation in the wake of the Watergate scandal. In spite of Granberry being trounced by Briscoe in the gubernatorial race and Republicans losing two big congressional elections, Texas was the only state in the nation to see a net gain of Republicans elected to office in the November election. Hence, while every other state in the nation suffered a net loss of Republican seats after the damage of Watergate and ensuing pardon of Nixon, Texas remarkably recorded a net gain of eight. Republican victories included two United States House members, three state senators, sixteen members of the State house, and fifty-three officeholders at the county level, which effectively offset the losses. Standing alone in Republican gains, Texas was certainly indicative of a state with a strong political undercurrent, which was hastened by John Connally’s switch to the Republicans in April 1973. Hence, by the 1974 elections, Connally’s move together with the momentum of the anti-feminist movement caused more white conservatives Democrats and Independents to move into Texas’s Republican Party, while the Democratic Party continued to draw upon the increasing liberal and minority vote.  

The campaign to rescind the ERA came to a head in April 1975 largely because of the efforts of the “Pink Ladies,” who, in Texas as well as other states, waged a full-fledged campaign to get their legislators to renounce the ERA. The Texas ladies swarmed into the state’s pink granite capitol in long pink party dresses, short pink mini-dresses, polyester pink maternity outfits, pink hats, pink shoes, and pink plastic purses setting off their blue-rinse perms. They came bearing the fresh-baked cakes for which they were renowned and begged their hometown representatives to save Texas children from unisex.

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toilets, homosexual marriages, and the destruction of the divine family structure. State Representative Bill Hilliard-R of Fort Worth, who introduced the bill for rescission, was convinced that a resolution to rescind Texas’ ratification of the ERA would be approved by the House, but uncertain about the Senate. Coinciding with the April 14 hearing was the anti-ERA rally, which had the feel of a fundamentalist protest meeting (some with Bibles), complete with singing and preaching the message (“Repeal the sinful ERA”). Once the resolution to rescind the ERA was introduced into the House; however, the anti-ERA groups discovered that the legislature did not like to handle controversial issues. The measure stayed buried in committee through the parliamentary maneuvers of its chairman, Ray Hutchinson of Dallas, and therefore, was never introduced in the Senate. Explaining the debacle, Hutchinson remarked that the question of rescinding the ERA’s ratification was viewed by many as “the legislative retirement act of 1975.” A vote either way could cost some lawmakers their seats in the next election, “and many would rather not face a vote on the issue.” Still, that the recision issue would come before the Texas legislature three more times before 1979 was a testament to the enduring strength of the state’s anti-feminist movement.  

That a fundamental religious belief was the driving force behind the anti-feminist movement in Texas was confirmed in a study conducted by University of Houston female students the day of the April 14 hearing in Austin. In the study, 154 women dressed in pink as well as the same number of pro-ERA supporters were given surveys to complete.

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with denominational preference being the independent variable while the dependent variable was activism on the ERA issue, either pro or anti. Presented in Table 1 is the breakdown of the sample into pro-ERA and anti-ERA activists along with their denominational affiliation.

Table 1: Denominational Preferences of Pro- and Anti-ERA Activists

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denominational Preferences</th>
<th>Anti-ERA Women</th>
<th>Pro-ERA Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nonaffiliates*</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>50.6% (79)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>1.9% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Protestant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congregational</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>0.6% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Episcopal</td>
<td>0.6% (1)</td>
<td>4.5% (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unitarian</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>3.2% (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Protestant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presbyterian</td>
<td>0.6% (1)</td>
<td>6.4% (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodist</td>
<td>9.2% (14)</td>
<td>10.3% (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>5.2% (8)</td>
<td>0.6% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative Protestant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptist**</td>
<td>9.2% (14)</td>
<td>6.4% (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lutheran</td>
<td>2.5% (4)</td>
<td>5.1% (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundamentalist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church of Christ</td>
<td>59.7% (92)</td>
<td>3.8% (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assembly of God</td>
<td>6.5% (10)</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pentecost</td>
<td>1.9% (3)</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sectarian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mormon</td>
<td>1.3% (2)</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>1.2% (2)</td>
<td>6.4% (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>1.9% (3)</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100.0% (154)</td>
<td>100.0% (156)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Included "atheists," "agnostics," "no preference," and "none."

**Our question on religious was open-ended, and we could not distinguish between Southern Baptists (usually thought of as being fundamentalist) and other Baptists. Consequently we classed all Baptists are conservative.

***May not total to exactly 100% due to rounding.

The most striking feature of the table is the large number of non-affiliates among the pro-ERA women and the even larger number of fundamentalists among the anti-ERA women. Non-affiliates accounted for 51 percent of the pro-ERA activists, while fundamentalists accounted for 66 percent of the anti-ERA activists. Combining groups,
non-affiliates, Jews, and liberal Protestants comprised 61 percent of the pro-ERA women; conservative Protestants, fundamentalists, and sectarians comprised almost 80 percent of the anti-ERA women. The study clearly reveals that Anti-feminism in Texas was part of an emerging socially conservative Right, consisting in large part of religious fundamentalists, who opposed what they saw as a breakdown of societal norms and traditions. 22

In a September 1975 Radio Program with new Republican presidential hopeful Ronald Reagan entitled “Equal Rights –Con,” the former conservative governor of California effectively pled his case against ERA ratification by first emphasizing his firm belief that equal work demanded equal pay, regardless of sex, that jobs should be awarded on the basis of merit and not sex, and that where brains and common sense were the criteria, women were just as capable as men. Reagan believed, however, that the ERA would take away laws that were passed especially to make sure that women were not put upon by men, such as divorce laws, child support laws, laws protecting women from being forced to work long hours at hard physical labor, and law pertaining to rape. Reagan also believed the ERA would force the United States in case of war not only to draft women, but also to put them in combat along side men, where they would undergo the same physical hardships and brutal experiences. U.S. Representative Charles E. Wiggins –R of California substantiated Reagan’s position when he told a group of law students at Southern Methodist University in February that the problem was that the ERA

granted “absolutely equal treatment,” without any regard for biological differences between the sexes. “You start playing that scenario out and you reach a lot of weird results that are not in the national interest,” exclaimed Wiggins. 23

Reagan also believed the ERA could be interpreted by some judges in ways that would degrade and de-feminize women by forcing them to mingle with men in close, intimate quarters, which he did not want to see and did not believe most Americans wanted to see such as restrooms, barracks, and shower rooms. “Human beings are not animals, and I do not want to see sex and sexual differences treated as casually and amorally as dogs and other beasts treat them. I believe this could happen under the ERA,” Reagan stated. Moreover, Reagan encouraged Americans to demand meaningful equality between the sexes, but to work for it at all levels of government and not amend the Constitution in such a way that would put Americans even further at the mercy of radical Congresses, power-hungry federal bureaucrats, and irresponsible judges. Reagan’s views resonated amiably with the GOP, whose socially conservative wing was steadily increasing in strength, particularly in Texas. Moreover, Reagan stood against abortion while President Ford, whose popularity was waning as the 1976 campaign neared, waffled over the issue of abortion but strongly supported the ERA. Consequently, Reagan outdistanced Ford by a margin of 2 to 1 in Texas’ Republican presidential primary, which

clearly showed that the ERA and abortion had become defining issues for a good number of the state’s voters. 24

Although Reagan ended up losing the Republican nomination to Ford by a slim margin, Democrat Jimmy Carter defeated Ford in the November election and walked into the White House under the heading of “Born Again,” which appealed to Texas’s large number of social conservatives, who could also identify with Carter being a southern Baptist. However, in the races for the Texas House of Representatives, it was easy to see that the GOP was making headway. In District 33, which made up Dallas County’s eighteen seats, Republicans gained seven seats compared to the 1974 election. Moreover, whereas eight of Dallas counties’ Democratic candidates ran unopposed in 1974, only six did in 1976. But most impressive were the significant turnarounds in five of the seven seats won by Republicans. For instance, in 33-B, which the Democrats won in 1974, Republican candidate Bill Blanton defeated Democrat Pat Hadsell 18,030 to 8,630 in 1976. In 33-E, Republican Bob Maloney ran unopposed winning 20,517 votes. In 33-P, Republican Bill Cerverha defeated Democrat Jo Coker 27,382 to 13,608. In 33-Q, Republican Lee Jackson defeated Democrat Barbara Glenn 23,380 to 12,391, and in 33-R, Republican Fred J. Agnich ran unopposed, getting 20,383 votes. A breakthrough occurred for the Republicans in Tarrant County (Dist. 32) where Bob McFarland defeated his Democrat opponent Douglass Duke 16,320 to 14,094 votes while two other races were closely fought. Also, in North Texas’s Collin County, Republican Connie

Armstrong ran a respectable race against Democrat Bob Hendricks, losing 18,679 to 15,592 votes. The two biggest surprises, however, came in Lubbock County, where Republican Joe Robbins broke a century-long Democratic stranglehold in being elected to the Texas House, and in Travis County, where the first Republican since Reconstruction was elected to the Travis County Courthouse as tax assessor-collector. 25

Harris County, which included Houston and its suburbs, also showed an increase in Republican state representatives between 1974 and 1976. Although Republicans could claim only one more of Harris county’s 23 seats (Districts 78-101) in 1976 over 1974, the races were closer and the Republican margin of victory was greater, particularly in Districts 83, 90, 91, 92, 93, and 94, all of which showed substantial turnarounds. Also, democratically owned districts 80 and 81, which went unopposed in 1974, were opposed by Republicans in 1976. In Bexar County, the former Democrat James Nowlin won again by running unopposed. Statewide, ten more Democratic House seats were opposed in 1976 than 1974 although the American Party and Raza Unida Party were two of the new opposition. Overall, however, Republicans picked up three seats in the Statehouse, bringing that total to nineteen, but the party’s strength in the Senate remained at three. Still, together with the number of House seats contested for the first time by Republicans

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and the increasing number of close elections, one could certainly draw the conclusion that the anti-feminist revolt was influencing Texas’s electorate.  

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The eyes of the nation fastened upon Texas in November of 1977 when Houston was chosen to host the National Women’s Year Conference, which was a spin off from the International Women’s Year (IWY) Conference held at Mexico City in 1975. After the United Nations proclaimed 1975 as International Women’s Year, a presidential order by Gerald Ford established a National Commission on the Observation of International Women’s Year to adopt recommendations aimed at eliminating barriers to equality for women. Consequently, 5 million dollars in U.S. federal funds were provided to ERA supporters to launch a national conference in hopes of expediting the ratification of the ERA. Although twenty-two states ratified the ERA in 1972, by 1977 only thirteen more had ratified, still leaving it three short of the needed thirty-eight. Moreover, three of the states that ratified; Nebraska, Tennessee, and North Carolina, had voted to rescind their ratification in addition to other states repeatedly refusing to ratify. Thus, the spirit of anti-feminism was clearly beginning to roll back the once surging tide of the feminists.

Consequently, feminists looked upon the Houston conference as an opportunity or ‘final push’ to get the needed thirty-eight states for the ratification of the ERA. 27  

As conference time neared, propaganda against the ERA had pitted conservative church-oriented women against feminists in almost a tribal battle, and Texas was as good

26  General Election for State Representative, Harris, Bexar counties, 1974, 1976; Box 49-50, Election Returns, MSS; Olien, From Token to Triumph, 242.  

a place as any to see how the battle would be waged. One person who was watching
closely was Liz Carpenter, who is best remembered as Lady Bird Johnson’s press
secretary. Carpenter, co-chairperson of ERAmerica and one of the organizers of the
Houston conference had offices in the LBJ library, which to Phyllis Schlafly and her
cohorts, represented that “bastion of radicalism” perched so audaciously atop the
University of Texas’s forty acres. In a *Dallas Times Herald* article, Carpenter exclaimed,

> One half of our citizens do not have the dignity of being in our Constitution. What
a travesty of justice that is women, the largest group left out in 1787, who still
stand outside the state legislature and beg. Who were we? Who sailed into
Jamestown and Plymouth? Waded the waters of the Sabine with a baby in one
arm and a rifle in the other? Walked alongside the covered wagons across the
Rockies? Does no one remember us? 28

Carpenter was also quick to emphasize that Texas’ main opposition to ERA was a
collection of religious groups such as the W’s, the Conservative Union and a battery of
other components. Acknowledging that women’s issues had not gotten so much attention
from the ultra right wing in the past, Carpenter insisted that the anti-feminists had latched
onto the ERA as the “sexiest” issue around. 29

On the conference’s opening day, First Ladies Rosalynn Carter, Betty Ford, and
Lady Bird Johnson sat sedately on the dais, the first time three presidents’ wives had
shared the same stage in support of the women’s movement. Other dignitaries included
Coretta Scott King, Texas politicians John Hill and William P. Hobby, Jr., and Judge
Sarah T. Hughes. Bella Abzug, former congresswoman and staunch pro-ERA activist,
was named by President Jimmy Carter to serve as the presiding officer of the convention,

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while congresswoman and Houston native Barbara Jordan delivered the keynote address.

The conference was the first meeting of its type in the United States since the Women’s Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848. The 2,000 delegates from fifty states and six territories truly represented the nation’s diversity in addition to the 15,000 to 20,000 observers. The Sam Houston Coliseum was full of American women of all ages, races, religions, occupations, ethnic groups, and classes. But unfortunately for the ERA supporters, it was also saturated with women championing non-traditional lifestyles. One reporter at the conference wrote that the conference was loaded with lesbians. “If it is true, as the conference sponsors allocate, that this Valley of Dykes is representative of the female population at large, then 150 percent of American women are homosexuals.”

Another report asserted that the most important “special interest group” represented at Houston was the lesbian movement. 30

Also undermining the conference were the booths of various controversial organizations set up in the IWY Exhibit Hall to promote their agenda: the San Francisco Bisexual (SFB) booth, whose newsletter headlined, “Defend Lesbian Rights”; the extreme left wing Pathfinder Press booth, which was selling a wide variety of Communist and Socialist literature, including Guardian and Communist Daily Word; the ultra left-league Prairie Fire Organizing Group of San Francisco, and not least, Margo St. James herself, head of Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics (COYOTE), who was promoting

her favorite cause, legalized prostitution, by passing out the program from her group’s Fourth Annual Hookers Masquerade Ball in San Francisco. The defining moment of the conference, however, came when the delegation voted to endorse both abortion and lesbian rights. Mrs. Minnie Maloy, a friendly Waco grandmother who had been a leader in Catholic women’s groups for many years and one of the few Texas anti-abortion delegates who had hoped that the feminists would break ranks and vote with her against the abortion resolution, reflected her utter dismay at its passage when she told a reporter, “I went off the floor and was physically sick. I’d like to go back to Duval County where I grew up and sit under a mesquite tree and not even think for a while.” Equally dismaying was Betty Friedan’s decision to stand before the delegates and urge them to vote a separate civil rights amendment for “our lesbian sisters,” when before Houston she had opposed a resolution protecting homosexual rights since it was the overriding argument by the STOP ERA people. Friedan was also a signer of the Humanist Manifesto, which clearly stated they did not believe in a Supreme Being, prayer, or a hereafter. 31

Meanwhile, across town, about 11,000 pro-family supporters gathered with Schlafly at the Astro Arena in opposition to lesbian rights, legal abortions, and the ERA. The press reported that it fell somewhere between a tent revival and a George Wallace rally whose crowd was mainly white, southern, and consisted of members of fundamentalist Protestant churches. At Schlafly’s rally, women and men shook Bibles,

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sang patriotic hymns, and denounced the ERA “as an all out assault on the American family.” Texas anti-ERA groups as well as the National Council of Catholic Women, the Mormon Church, the Daughters of the American Revolution, and the John Birch Society were all represented. Speaking as the keynoter at Schlafly’s rally, California congressman Robert Dornan (R) said that “the great tragedy…was to see two former first ladies and the wife of the president stand by Bella Abzug and by their presence approving sexual perversion and the murder of unborn babies.” Noted ERA proponent Gloria Steinem, however, managed to maintain a sense of humor. After being told that Schlafly’s group believed all the women at the IWY conference were lesbians, she laughed and asked, “If we’re all lesbians, where are we getting all these unborn babies to kill?” 32

The polar viewpoints dramatized by the two gatherings have been described as feminist versus anti-feminist, religious versus secular, traditionalist versus modernist, states’ rights versus federalism, conservative versus liberal. For many of the folks at the AstroArena, however, it was nothing less than the forces of good versus the forces of evil. Therefore, following Houston, Texas’ anti-feminist coalition became even more encouraged that the good versus evil scenario would lean favorably toward them in the upcoming election. State Senator Andujar wrote to Shawn De Napoli of Springtown, Texas following the IWY Conference deploring the fact that the “first ladies” appeared at the conference and thereby seemed to sanction resolutions on abortion and lesbian rights. “They certainly do not represent any significant proportion of women yet we must fight them,” stated Andujar. The woman state Senator also believed that the feminist

movement had been counterproductive in the eyes of many. Writing to Keith Loyd of Azle, Texas she stated, “the IWY meeting in Houston last November was a demonstration for all to see that ERA is not what many people think it is.” Moreover, in Fort Worth the following November, a Pro-Family Coalition put on a huge rally in the city’s largest auditorium, where about 8,000 people attended. The rally was similar to Schlafly’s pro-family rally in Houston in that it reflected a large number of Texans rejected the so-called anti-family goals and tactics of the Commission on International Women’s Year. 33

The backlash and fallout from the IWY Houston conference not only revealed the controversial aspects of the ERA, but also laid the groundwork for the 1978 state elections. The issue of abortion was enough in itself to draw the ire of the state’s unusually large population of Catholic and Protestant fundamentalists who placed a premium on the sanctity of life. The endorsement of lesbian rights, however, together with the other implications of the ERA deemed as undesirable to the state’s Catholic and Protestant majority, turned what may have first appeared on the surface as controversial into a firestorm. The predominance of religious denominations in Texas that embraced religious traditionalism was pushed beyond the limit by the Houston IWY conference. No longer could the Democratic Party, which had suddenly become defined by its support for abortion and the ERA, expect the support from many of its traditionally socially conservative members. Consequently, this backlash proved to be a determining factor in Texas electing its first Republican governor in over one hundred years. Republican Bill

Clements, president of SEDCO International Drilling, defeated Texas’s Democratic Attorney General John Hill in a squeaker by a slim margin of 16,860 votes, or eight-tenths of one percent of the vote out of 2,369,764 votes cast. Winning 49.9 percent of the vote, Clements carried ninety-six counties, which included eleven of the twenty most populous counties, but most notably Dallas (59%), Harris (53%), Lubbock (55%), and Tarrant (53%). Perhaps the key votes, however, came from the thirty-two traditionally Democratic rural counties that Clements managed to swing to the Republican column.  

Aiding the anti-feminist movement in Clements’ victory was Project 230, which was an effort on behalf of the Clements campaign to organize the 230 rural counties in Texas that did not have a Republican county chairman. This involved Clements and his wife Rita traveling in a motor home to cover the vast distances in order to reach the grass roots people in the hundreds of towns across rural Texas. Also factoring in to Clements’s success in rural Texas was the residue left over from the bitter primary battle between Clements’s opponent Hill and Dolph Briscoe, who would have become the longest-serving governor in Texas history if reelected. Hill, a moderate-progressive, attacked Briscoe as a “do-nothing governor,” and won the endorsement of teachers by championing education and a handsome pay raise. Surprisingly, Hill defeated Briscoe with 52 percent of the vote, but in the process ruffled the incumbent’s feathers with some smarting remarks. As a result, many Briscoe supporters, including his wife and children, actively campaigned for Clements in the general election. Janey Briscoe, Dolph’s wife, told reporters that “Bill Clements is a more conservative man,” and that he would be

34 Strickland, "Significance and Impact," 221; Olien, From Token to Triumph, 259-60; Kingston, Attlesey, and Crawford, Political History of Texas, 308-11.
“more responsible” in knowing the value of the dollar. Hill, on the other hand, did nothing to actively seek the support of Governor Briscoe. It became even more evident that the Briscoe-Hill feud had aided Clements when it was learned that thirty of the thirty-two traditional rural Democratic counties Clements swung in the general election had supported Briscoe in the Democratic primary. Hence, Project 230 and the fallout from the Briscoe-Hill feud effectively added to the numbers of the socially conservative Democrats who were being pushed into the Republican Party because of their party’s embrace of the ERA.  

Discussions of Clements’ victory must also include the continued efforts of the TFRW and Clements’ campaign purse. By 1978, the TFRW had grown to over 6,000 members and given over 38,000 hours of volunteer work to Republican candidates in the various campaigns. These women canvassed, mailed letters, and worked Clements’s phone banks. Hence, the impact of these women upon the 1978 election lent credence to the saying that in Texas’s GOP “the men provide the candidates and raise the money, while the women win elections.” SEDCO, which was a $750-million drilling company and the largest in the world, had reported profits at $43.6 million in 1976 and amassed Clements a personal fortune of $30 million by the time of his campaign for governor. In the Republican gubernatorial primary, Clements spent $2.2 million in his win over state party chairman Ray Hutchinson. In his victory over Hill, however, Clements spent $7 million, the most ever spent in a non-presidential political race, which the *Texas*  

Government Newsletter attributed to enabling Clements to assemble a team of the “best political brains and trouble shooters in the country.”  

The other major statewide race involved Senator Tower vying for a fourth consecutive term against Bob Krueger, the two-term congressman from the Twenty-first District. In spite of Krueger’s numerous personal attacks and mudslinging, Tower, like Clements, won a razor thin victory with 49.8 percent of the vote, or a margin of 12,227 out of 2,312,540 total votes cast. The urban vote again accounted for Tower’s victory as he won over 55 percent of the vote in Harris County while also winning Dallas, Lubbock, and Tarrant counties. In the Legislature, the GOP Texas House total rose to twenty-two, with a net gain of three seats. Two of the newcomers, Bob Leonard and Bob Ware were from Tarrant County, where Republicans increased their numbers to three. In Dallas County Republicans held on to their seven seats from the previous election, but also made close races in District 33-H and I. In Harris County, Republicans retained the six seats from 1974, but also ran much closer races in District 84, 97, and particularly 100, where Republican candidate Randy Pennington lost to Democrat Bill Caraway 10, 220 to 9, 119. Although no Republican gains occurred in Bexar, Lubbock or Collin counties, there were more closely contested races than in 1976. Hence, largely because of its backlash to the feminist movement, Texas was beginning to resemble something a bit closer to a two-party state after the 1978 election.

36 Olien, From Token to Triumph, 243, 252; Barta, Bill Clements, 189, 198, 216.
37 Knaggs, Two-Party Texas, 212-231; Kingston, Atleesey, and Crawford, Texas Almanac’s Political History of Texas, 162-65; General Election for State Representative; Bexar, Collin, Dallas, Harris, Lubbock, Tarrant, 1978, Box 51, Election Returns MSS.
By the date of Clements’ inauguration, there were twenty-three Republicans in the Texas House because Gerald Mason won a special election for a Hill County seat while the legislature was in session, and four in the Senate, a record to that date. Texas voters also sent two more Republican congressmen to Washington, and the number of Texas Democratic House seats contested by Republicans since 1976 increased by six as well as the number of close contests. Courthouse victories were recorded in Collin, Lipscomb, Kerr, Gray, Mason, Midland, Randall, and Smith counties, where Republican county judge candidates all won elections. Commenting on the 1978 election, the Texas Observer stated, “This was not quite the way everyone had it figured: Bill Clements is busy arranging inaugural parties while our man, John Hill, is shopping around Austin for suitable space to house his new law office.” Moreover, the Observer accurately accessed that Texas’s Democratic Party had come to a “fork in the road.” This was not only reflected in the Democratic gubernatorial primary when the progressive Hill defeated the conservative and Establishment candidate Briscoe, but also in the general election when Clements upset Hill. Because thousands of new feminist voters joined labor and minorities, Texas’s liberal Democrat coalition was strengthened, which was evidenced in Hill’s defeat of Briscoe. At the same time, however, more socially conservative Democrats were moving into the Republican Party, causing the Democratic Party to become more divided, or, in the Observer’s words, at a “fork in the road.” Because of Texas’s backlash to the feminist movement, however, that fork became more pronounced. 38

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38 Olien, From Token to Triumph, 262-63; Knaggs, Two-Party Texas, 231; General Election for
In retrospect, Republican ascendancy in Texas during the 1970s cannot be
legitimately discussed without also including the effects of political redistricting,
urbanization, and the lingering effects from the Civil Rights Acts. By 1976, however,
redistricting had only accounted for two Republican seats in the House, Lubbock and
Arlington. When discussing the effects of redistricting in East Texas, local NAACP
president Arthur Weaver of Nacogdoches County remarked in 1977 that “a lot of blacks
and poor whites still believe in the boss man. And they hear threats of job loss if they
vote with the Voters League, (a black political organization).” Redistricting was helping
change the political composition of the House, but as far as Republicans were concerned,
that change was very gradual. Moreover, urban and suburban growth accounted for an
approximate 15 percent increase of the state’s population between 1970 and 1980 as a
large number of middle to upper-middle class northerners who were plagued by
unemployment migrated to the metropolitan areas of Dallas and Houston. Standing
against the empowerment of labor unions, heavy government regulation of business, and
special concessions to minorities, these new urban and suburban dwellers helped swell
the ranks of the Republican Party, thus, having a significant impact upon the increase of
Republican voters in Dallas and Houston counties. Yet when compared to the issue of
feminism, which struck at the very moral fiber of a majority of religious fundamentalists
living across the state, urban and suburban growth, which only applied to specific areas,
also has to be considered a secondary factor to Republican ascendancy in Texas during the 1970s. 39

Regarding race, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 undoubtedly pushed some conservative Texas Democrats into the Republican Party; however, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 also permitted the federal government to withdraw financial aid from schools still refusing to desegregate in lieu of the Brown v. Board ruling of 1954. The Mansfield School District, for example, integrated in 1965 under the threat of losing federal funds. By 1970, over 75 percent of Texas’s black students attended schools that were integrated to some degree, and in the 1970-1971 school year, a federal judge combined the last nine all-black school districts in East Texas with adjoining white or biracial districts. Thus, by the early 1970s, the repercussions from the Brown v. Board decision in Texas were beginning to be less pronounced when compared to a number of other southern states. Moreover, by the beginning of the 1970s, African Americans in Texas, unlike any other southern state, were beginning to make a noticeable difference in the political landscape. Barbara Jordan of Houston became the first ever black woman to serve in the Texas Senate with her election to that body in 1966, and in 1972 she became the first black woman from the South to win a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. Two other African American candidates, Curtis Graves of Houston and Joseph E. Lockridge of Dallas, won seats to the state house of representatives in 1966, and at the beginning of the 1970s, forty-two African Americans served at the local level of government while a good number held city council seats across the state. Furthermore,

because the “Dallas way” of integration was adopted and successfully implemented by other Texas cities, the title of black sociologist William Julius Wilson’s 1978 book, *The Declining Significance of Race*, certainly has to apply to Texas politics in the 1970s. Although race would continue to have a lingering effect upon party identification among some Texas voters, there was a retreat from the racial absolutism of the 1950s and 1960s. Thus, when compared to the backlash from the feminist movement, the issue of race also has to be considered as a secondary factor in precipitating Republican ascendancy in Texas during the 1970s. 40

When Phyllis Schlafly remarked that the average man thought that ERA meant Earned Run Average while the average woman thought it was a Proctor & Gamble detergent, she was probably fairly close to being correct once the amendment was quickly passed by Congress and sent to the states for ratification. Schlafly’s fortitude, however, in rallying a festering opposition against a seemingly inevitable ratification of the ERA certainly has to be exalted. Yes, the ERA’s original goals of equal employment opportunities, equal pay for equal work, equal opportunities for political office and admission to medical schools were certainly legitimate ones which a majority of Americans might very well have supported in the 1970s. However, when a disgruntled group of women led by Betty Friedan began to challenge the traditional role of the family while aligning themselves with the ERA, it spelled doom for the amendment’s

ratification. Moreover, the radical views and actions of the “second wave” feminists culminating in the Houston fiasco only served to increase and rally the religious opposition, particularly in Texas. A large number of fundamentalist Protestant women who had previously been apolitical suddenly had a reason to become involved in politics while many traditionally conservative Democratic men who felt alienated by their party’s embrace of feminists began to switch parties. Therefore, because the underlying social issue facing Texans in the seventies threatened their very own fundamental religious beliefs, political realignment was inevitable for a highly religious state whose religion produced a strong conservative bent to its politics.  

41 Phyllis Schlafly Report, Jan. 1977, v. iv, no. 7, sec. 2; Rymph, Republican Women, 231.
Republican Bill Clements’ victory in the 1978 gubernatorial race had a profound impact upon the political arena in Texas. Being the first Republican governor to be elected since Reconstruction, his victory proved, finally, that a Republican could capture the fulcrum of power in state government. Although his victory gave the semblance that two-party competitive politics had arrived in Texas, a true two-party system would not be achieved until significant numbers of political offices on the state and local levels were filled by Republicans. Bo Byers of the Houston Chronicle summed it up best when after the 1980 election he asked why the governor was the “only Republican who has been able to win a statewide state office” and why were the Republicans only able to pick up “only one additional Texas congressional seat” in light of Reagan’s sweep of Texas and the legislative gains. After the 1984 election, however, Republicans edged a bit closer because for the very first time, their candidates were viable in every portion of the state and at every level of the ballot. They recorded a record ten members in Texas’ Congressional delegation, fifty-two members in the Texas House of Representatives, 287 county officeholders, and ninety officials at the district level. Moreover, the state House delegations of the two most populous counties, Harris (Houston) and Dallas, had moved from one-party domination by Democrats to Republican domination. What were the
underlying factors precipitating such shifts among Texas voters between 1978 and 1984?\(^1\)

As monumental as his victory was, Governor Clements soon found that his close and bitterly fought campaign with Hill was just the beginning of a courtship with “181 ego-driven politicians” known as the Texas Legislature. In addition, the presiding officer of the Senate, Lieutenant Governor Bill Hobby, was an entrenched Democrat who had become accustomed to having his way in an office with more Constitutional power than that of governor. In the spring of 1979, however, conservative Democrats were faced with a menacing scenario. Haunted by record inflation and an energy crisis, the Carter Administration was unpopular in Texas, a condition that was likely to intensify and possibly lead to a record voter turnout in the Republican primary in 1980. A record turnout would be even more likely if contenders George Bush and John Connally joined the already popular Ronald Reagan in the race. Since the 1976 presidential primary had garnered nearly one-half million voters with the Reagan-Ford match-up, adding Connally and Bush could easily push it to one million. Of particular concern to Democrats was that most of those hundreds of thousands projected to vote in the Republican Primary for the first time would be “Connallycrats.” In other words, if predictions held true, the GOP Primary would deny conservative voting strength in the Democratic Primary, thus allowing liberal voters to gain a foothold. Hence, the stakes were nothing short of a major leap forward to a two-party system in Texas. \(^2\)


In a straw poll conducted at the Midwest Republican Leadership Conference in March, 295 GOP leaders from 13 Midwestern states gave a strong show of support to former Texas Governor John Connally, who they believed stood the best chance of winning in November 1980 against a Democrat. George Bush, having represented Texas in Congress in addition to having served as Chairman of the Republican National Committee (RNC) and Director of the CIA, was also popular among Texans, particularly many women because of his support for legalized abortion and the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). Hence, to address their problem, conservative Democrats rallied behind a “split primary” concept in which voters would be allowed to vote in a GOP presidential primary, then still cast votes for other offices in the regular Democratic Primary. Texas’s Presidential Primary can be attributed to Senator Lloyd Bentsen, who in 1975 had the bill rammed through congress to help his presidential bid. By the time the primary rolled around, however, Jimmy Carter had rolled over him like a “smiling Sherman tank.” Because the Republican presidential primary that year also featured Ronald Reagan and Gerald Ford, thousands of conservative Democrats were drawn to the Republican voting booths to cast votes in the new presidential primary. Having set the new presidential primary on the same day as the state’s regular nominating primaries in May, however, the Democratic controlled legislature unwittingly facilitated a large detour of Democratic voters to the GOP. Thus, it hurt conservative Democrats not only for elective offices, but also for party control.

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Conservative Democrats’ fears also stemmed from the thought that if enough conservatives were pulled away from the Democratic booths to the Republican booths, liberal and moderate Democrats would be the ones to draw legislative and congressional districts in 1981, which could effectively remove the conservative hold over Texas government. Realizing the menacing scenario, conservative Democrats, led by Lieutenant Governor Bill Hobby, House Speaker Bill Clayton, and Senator Jack Ogg of Houston called for a “split primary,” which would allow conservative Democrats to vote in a Republican presidential primary in March and return in May to nominate conservative Democrats to state seats. In other words, the conservative Democrats figured the only way they could avoid even a larger drain of conservatives to the Republican Party in 1980 was to set up their own presidential primary, but separate it from the regular primary, allowing someone to choose Connally for president and then return to the Democratic primary later to vote for other offices. This scheme would benefit Connally, whose large following of conservative Democrats would be at ease knowing that they could vote for him in the GOP Primary without forfeiting their interests in the Democratic Primary.  

Republicans wasted little time in voicing their disdain for conservative Democrats’ call for a “split primary” measure. In response to what became known as Senate Bill 602, or the ‘Ogg Bill’, named after Senator Jack Ogg of Houston, the Arlington Republican Women’s Club wrote to Republican State Senator Betty Andujar

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insisting that the “Democratic establishment leaders should not be allowed to change the
Election Code in their efforts to negate the gains that have been made toward a true two-party state.” The Republican Party of Dallas County told Andujar that the bill was
“irresponsible and cannot be justified.” They added, “to ask the non-paid volunteers, the
hard working Election Judges and Clerks who are paid less than minimum wage to repeat
the awesome task of another primary is extremely unfair.” The Texas Advocate stressed
that allowing voters from one party to play a decisive role in selecting the opposing
party’s candidates undermined the whole purpose of the primary, therefore, was
inherently wrong. The most glaring public indictment of the Ogg Bill, however, was that
it undermined the idea that its advocates were conservatives since it would cost taxpayers
an extra $3-4 million to have an extra primary. “The 4+ million dollars which it would
cost is an insult to tax payers,” remarked Republican election official Eileen Kavanaugh
of Fort Worth.  

Responding to the strong opposition of her constituents to the split primary bill,
Senator Andujar replied from her Austin office that “the politics down here is thicker
than ever and the conservative Democrats want to avoid being wounded if at all
possible.” Although tremendous pressure was exerted from powerful interests to adopt
the measure, Hobby realized that SB 602 did not have sufficient votes in the Senate to
pass on its own merits. Consequently, the Lieutenant Governor reverted to the old

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5 Jewel Fleming to Betty Andujar, May 5, 1979, Glenna Mikes to Andujar, April 23, 1979,
Republican Party of Dallas County to Andujar, Mar. 2, 1979, Eileen Kavanaugh to Andujar, May 5, 1979,
file 254, Box 50-2, Betty Andujar Papers, (Manuscripts Division, University of Texas at Arlington, Texas
[hereafter cited as Andujar MSS]); “Democrats Split Over Primary Date,” Austin American Statesman, Mar.
majority rule to get passed an innocuous election bill (SB-1149) proposed by Senator Bill Meier of Euless, which required financial accountability of local party chairmen. Although the bill appeared innocuous, it was dubbed a Trojan Horse because it could be amended in the House to include a separate presidential primary. After being debated for less than fifteen minutes on Tuesday Morning, May 15, and given tentative approval on a 17 to 14 vote, under Senate rules it would have to wait until Friday to get final passage. Convinced that Hobby would break a filibuster on SB-1149 once it came back up on Friday, twelve moderate to liberal senators opposed to the bill turned an election issue into a legislative fiasco. Dubbed the “Killer Bees” by Hobby, who had applied the nickname early on in the session to some of the liberals who would mount impromptu filibusters on other issues, these senators decided to “hide out” for a few days – until forty-eight hours prior to the end of the session if necessary – denying Hobby a quorum in his thirty-one member Senate. Within forty-eight hours of the end, the Senate rules were such that the Killer Bees would prevail. 6

Once the Senate bell began ringing at 9:30 a.m. on Friday, March 18, and it became obvious what had occurred, Hobby ordered Senate Sergeant-at-Arms Kelly Arnold to put his troops in the field to find the senators. They searched all the logical spots, like the Quorum Club, the Driskill Hotel, Travis County Commissioner Ann Richards’ house, former Senate Secretary Charlie Schnabel’s Ranch, The Raw Deal, the Texas Trial Lawyers’ Association office, the AFL-CIO headquarters, and several other

places, but to no avail. One wag even suggested the “bees” might be hiding out in one of
Lester Roloff’s child care homes, referring to the evangelist’s long-running refusal to
allow licensing workers into the home. After all searches proved futile, a mysterious
message showed up at 4 p.m. in the office of ‘Killer Bee’ Gene Jones of Houston, who
had resorted to using a pay telephone so that he would not be traced. 7 The message read,

We are absent today because this is our only available positive way to defeat a
proposed law which would create a rigged presidential primary which the people
of Texas do not want, did not ask for and which would cost Texas citizens $5
million of hard-earned tax money. 8

Although Governor Clements and other Republicans were opposed to a split
primary, they realized that the “Killer Bees” were drawing unwanted publicity,
particularly from a liberal press that sold the liberal senators “like gangbusters.” The front
page of the New York Times read, “12 Austin Senators Still in Hiding, Embarrassing the
Texas Rangers.” Advocating such dire measures as stripping committee assignments and
even declaring the Bees’ seats vacant, both Governor Clements and Hobby resorted to
bluff and bluster to persuade the legislative refugees to return to their work. On Tuesday
afternoon, four days after they had departed, the Killer Bees returned triumphantly and
unrepentant to the Texas Senate as supporters in the packed galleries roared their
approval and partisan state representatives cheered. Crowds sported Killer Bee T-shirts,
Killer Bee lapel pins and stickers that said “Thanks.” Nine of the bees had hidden in a
friend’s one-room garage apartment five miles from the State Capitol and the other three

7 “Where Are the Killer Bees: Senators Vanish in Tiff Over Bill; Hobby Orders Their Arrest,”
Austin American Statesman, May 19, 1979; “Bees Have Capitol Abuzz,” Austin American Statesman, May

8 “Where Are the Killer Bees: Senators Vanish in Tiff Over Bill; Hobby Orders Their Arrest,”
found hideouts in Oklahoma, Mexico, and Houston. Responding to criticism at a brief news conference upon their return to the Senate, Killer Bee Carl Parker of Port Arthur stated, “They talk of how embarrassing this is, how the Senate looks. Well, how does the whole state look when the rules are changed specifically for one presidential candidate (Connally).” Legislative chaplain Dr. Gerald Mann summed up the flight of the bees when he stated in the Senate prayer, “Lord, let us be reminded of the lessons in nature. The bee always fertilizes the flowers it robs.” The bees returned to the Senate unscathed and the split primary was dead for the session. ⁹

The proposed “split primary” by the Democrats and the ensuing flight of the “Killer Bees” marked yet another episode in the unfolding drama of party realignment occurring within Texas. It also revealed that the state’s conservative Democratic leadership was not opposed to changing old statutes if it meant retaining control of the state, which sowed greater seeds of doubt among members of their own constituency, who, like Connally, were dismayed at the direction the Democratic party was moving. Following that session, Anita Hill, a Democratic state representative from Garland, and Clay Smothers, a Democratic state representative from Oak Cliff, decided to cast their lot with the GOP. Mrs. Hill explained that she could foresee no circumstance under which she could support any of the three current potential Democratic nominees for president – President Carter, Senator Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts or California Governor

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Jerry Brown. Compounding her problem, she added, “is the fact that the control and direction of the state Democratic Party has been and is continuing to be ever toward the liberal philosophy.” Echoing the sentiments of the conservative Democrats who preceded her in switching to the Republican Party, Hill said, “I don’t consider that I am leaving the Democratic Party but that it has left me.” Smothers made the switch to run for Congress in the 24th District against incumbent Democrat Martin Frost, who supported school busing and abortion while State Senator William Braecklein of Highland Park switched to the Republican Party in August as a “matter of principle.” Another high-ranking Dallas Republican said a number of conservative Democrats were “assessing their positions,” while Republican State Senator Betty Andujar said that the “Killer Bee” episode would precipitate the “final transition of power in the Texas Democratic Party from the conservatives to the total liberal wing.”

By the early spring of 1980, many conservative Democrats breathed a sigh of relief as John Connally withdrew his candidacy after having sustained too many primary defeats, which left Republicans to choose between Bush and Reagan. Though Bush was making his first try for national office, he had entered the race with the invaluable experience of two Senate campaigns and one congressional, which was a win. Bush was also aided by his longtime friend Jim Baker, the Houston attorney who lost his bid as a candidate for attorney general in 1978, and Hal DeMoss, a respected GOP leader from

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Houston, both of whom knew how to manage a campaign. Bush’s support of legalized abortion and the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) also garnered the support of a large number of Texas women. Reagan, however, still had a potent organization remaining from his decisive victory over Gerald Ford in the 1976 primary, in which he outdistanced the incumbent president by a 2 to 1 margin. Reagan also strongly opposed legalized abortion and the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), which appealed to a majority of Texas’ conservatives who were predominantly of the Protestant or Catholic faith, therefore, advocates of pro-life and family values. When the two popular contenders faced off in the May primary, Reagan tallied 268,798 votes to Bush’s 249,819, capturing nearly 52 percent of the vote from a record voter turnout of 526,769. Hence, Reagan’s position on abortion and the ERA more closely aligned with conservative Texans than that of Bush. More importantly, Reagan’s victory in Texas also assured the national party’s nomination of Reagan. 11

Reagan’s victory over Bush became even more significant once Reagan heeded Governor Clements’ advice and named Bush as his running mate, which solidified the Republican base in Texas as well as other states. Heading into the 1980 election, however, Texas Republicans were not only the benefactors of urbanization, but suburbanization as well. Between 1970 and 1980 the population of the state mushroomed from 11,198,655 to 14,229,191 or 27.1 percent, an increase that trended a bit more

toward urban than rural. During this time, 55 percent of the state’s growth was from in-
migration, and a large number of these new inhabitants migrated from northern cities
plagued by steadily increasing unemployment figures. They sought and found jobs in the
petroleum, agribusiness, aerospace, and computer industries. Traditionally, the
Republican vote held strongest in the metropolitan areas of Harris and Dallas Counties
where the populations of the major cities of Houston and Dallas saw surges of 43.3 and
25.1 percent. Moreover, the 1980 census reflected an increase of 64.5 percent in the
urban fringe, an area where the GOP historically found support. These middle to upper-
middle class white voters adhered to a conservative philosophy that stood against the
empowerment of labor unions, heavy government on business, the alleged over-
burgeoning welfare system, and perceived special concessions for minorities. As the
population of urban counties and surrounding suburbs exploded, so did membership in
the Republican ranks. Thus, it came as no surprise in 1980 when for the first time more
people voted in the GOP primary than the Democratic in the state’s two most populous
counties, Harris (Houston) and Dallas. 12

A prime example of suburbanization facilitating the state’s Republican surge in
North Texas is Denton County, Texas, adjacent northwesterly to Dallas County. As
Texas’ cities continued to face rising crime rates and tensions stemming from
desegregation and rapid population growth, many preferred the lifestyle offered by

12 Kenneth Bridges, Twilight of the Texas Democrats: the 1978 Governor’s Race” (College
Station: Texas A&M University, 2008), 16; Arnold Vedlitz, James A. Dyer, and David B. Hill, “The
Changing Texas Voter,” in Robert H. Swansbrough and David M. Brodsky, The South’s New Politics
(Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 38; Strickland, "Significance and Impact," 225-26;
(accessed June 6, 2012); Knaggs, Two-Party Texas, 238.
smaller, typically more homogeneous communities outside the major cities. Between 1960 and 1980 Denton County’s population tripled, with the majority of the increase due to in-migrants, those living in the region at the time, but who grew up outside the South. Its highest growth rate of 89 percent, however, occurred between 1970 and 1980, which ranked it 53rd among all US counties and second in North Texas behind Collin County. Most of Denton County’s growth occurred in the southeastern quadrant of the county, the area closest to Dallas. Two-thirds of the population increase was accounted for by the three most southeasterly census tracts adjoining Dallas County, whose share of the total county population rose from 18 percent in 1960 to 42 percent in 1980. Thus, by 1980 nearly one-fifth of the county’s population resided in two southeastern communities, Carrollton and The Colony, which did not exist within the county in 1970. Meanwhile, a third southeastern city, Lewisville, had grown from 3,000 people to over 24,000. It is in this quadrant of the county that the Republican strength is most apparent. Table 2 contains precinct-level gubernatorial results for the period 1968-1986. The data have been arranged to represent three distinct areas of the county: northwest, the city of Denton, and the southeast.

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<tr>
<th>Year *</th>
<th>Northwest D</th>
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<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>5,133</td>
<td>4,672</td>
<td>1,560</td>
<td>1,129</td>
<td>10,366</td>
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<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>3,306</td>
<td>4,237</td>
<td>1,009</td>
<td>2,219</td>
<td>6,854</td>
<td>7,332</td>
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<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>449</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>6,046</td>
<td>6,713</td>
<td>1,961</td>
<td>3,168</td>
<td>11,761</td>
<td>13,279</td>
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<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>2,906</td>
<td>1,893</td>
<td>2,154</td>
<td>1,249</td>
<td>7,294</td>
<td>3,941</td>
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<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>4,257</td>
<td>3,747</td>
<td>2,721</td>
<td>4,846</td>
<td>9,870</td>
<td>11,640</td>
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<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>523</td>
<td>354</td>
<td>5,750</td>
<td>4,943</td>
<td>4,946</td>
<td>9,054</td>
<td>15,113</td>
<td>18,143</td>
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<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>445</td>
<td>676</td>
<td>4,964</td>
<td>5,313</td>
<td>7,023</td>
<td>13,406</td>
<td>16,575</td>
<td>26,267</td>
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<tr>
<td>Straight ticket (1986)</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>1,866</td>
<td>1,250</td>
<td>2,020</td>
<td>4,020</td>
<td>6,058</td>
<td>8,035</td>
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*Beginning with the 1974 election, Texas governors have been elected to four terms.
Comparing these areas within the county – with different rates of growth – provides some indication of the connection between the growth in population and the political transformation of the county between 1970 and 1980. This transformation is also reflected in Denton County supporting Clements in the 1978 gubernatorial race. Not having voted Democratic in a governor’s race since, Denton County had become solidly Republican. ¹³

A study of The Colony offers further evidence of the nature of this voter shift in Denton County. Established in 1973 on 3,000 acres of farmland by Fox & Jacobs, by 1982 this city had a population of 16,000. Over two-thirds of the residents were nonnative Texans, and of these 80 percent had moved to Texas since 1970 with the most dramatic increases occurring after 1977. Among those residents voting in 1982, more than 60 percent reported voting Republican in the gubernatorial, United House and Senate, and county commissioner races. By a margin of 35 percent to 29 percent, the residents described themselves as Republicans rather than Democrats, and this tendency toward Republicanism was more pronounced among nonnative Texans. Overall, slightly more than a third of “The Colony” residents regarded themselves as Republicans, but those who voted were much more likely to vote Republican than Democratic. Few

Colony residents considered themselves as liberal; however, nearly a half of them were regarded as conservative. 14

Collin County, which today contains the sprawling suburbs of Plano, McKinney, and Allen just north of Dallas, increased its population between 1970 and 1980 from 66,920 to 144,576, or more than doubled. Compared to between 1960 and 1970, when the population increased from only 41,247 to 66,920, Collin County represents another prime example of suburbanization. Like Denton County, this population increase was largely because of sizable numbers of white middle and upper-middle-class residents who were largely in-migrants seeking opportunities in the growing computer industries. The political impact of this population burst can be easily detected when tracing the county’s election returns for United States Senator Lloyd Bentsen. In 1970, when Collin County was still largely rural, small-town, and Democratic, Bentsen carried the county by 1,774 out of less than 13,000 votes over George Bush. Although Bentsen faced weaker Republican opponents in each subsequent race, he still lost Collin County by 3,920 votes in 1976, by 7,922 votes in 1982, and by 11,094 votes in 1988, in which more than 90,000 votes were tallied. Thus, like Denton County, Collin County, largely because of suburbanization, shifted from solid Democratic to predominantly Republican. 15


Two counties bordering Houston which give further credence to suburbanization influencing Republican voting strength are Fort Bend County, southwest of Houston, and Montgomery County, north of Houston. Today, Fort Bend County contains the large suburbs of Sugarland, Richmond, and Rosenberg. In 1960, however, the population of Fort Bend County was only 41,247 and increased to 66,920 in 1970, but by 1980, it has mushroomed to 144,576, or more than doubled. Like Collin and Denton counties in North Texas, it remained a Democratic Party stronghold until the 1970s when a population boom, which consisted of a majority of white middle upper-middle class with conservative political ideas, changed the trend. This was reflected in a special election in 1976 when the county’s citizens elected Republican Ron Paul to Congress. Paul, a physician from Brazoria County, was the first Republican elected to office in Fort Bend County since Reconstruction. Two years later, Tom DeLay became the first Republican state House member elected from Fort Bend County. Montgomery County, which today contains the large suburbs of Conroe and the Woodlands, increased its population between 1970 and 1980 from 49,479 to 128,487, which was also largely white middle upper-middle class. In fact, in 1990, Montgomery County was still over 90 percent white. Its voter shift can be reflected in presidential elections, where until the early 1960s Democratic candidates were unbeatable. Beginning in 1968, however, Republican presidential candidates have won with steadily increasing numbers while some Republican statewide candidates have outpolled Democratic candidates two to one a number of times.16

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16 United States Census Bureau, "Population of Counties by Decennial Census: 1900 to 1990, Fort
Texas’s population boom and ensuing suburbanization, however, was facilitated by an economic boom marked by the rebound of Texas oil, which averaged a meager $3.87 per barrel in 1973. After being “mired in doldrums” for nearly two decades, the fortunes of Texas oil began to change in October 1973 when Syria and Egypt attacked Israel in what came to be known as the Yom Kippur War. Since both the United States and Netherlands supported Israel, Libya’s militant leader Muammar al-Gaddafi persuaded the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, OPEC, to boycott both countries, which was essentially a declaration of war for supporting Israel. This turned into a nightmare for most Americans as prices on every conceivable oil-dependent product, particularly gasoline, drastically increased, which precipitated the worst recession in the Western hemisphere since the Great Depression. The Arab oil embargo, however, also acted as a “second coming” for Texas oilmen, because suddenly discussions focused upon finding more American oil, thus decreasing dependence upon that in the Middle East. As a result, wildcat drilling in West Texas increased 22 percent in 1974 alone. Well completions across the state rose by a third, and in 1976 all the majors spent three times more on exploration. Consequently, throughout the mid-seventies, “would-be oil finders” like George W. Bush began pouring into the state. In 1978, however, things got even better for Texas’s economy after the fall of the shah of Iran, which led to dramatic disruptions in Arabian oil exports, driving the price of oil steadily
upward until by 1980 it had reached a record high of $34 a barrel, a 2,000 percent increase in seven years. Hence, most of Texas’s rapid suburban growth during the 1970s occurred during an economic boom that was highlighted by the state’s rising oil prices. 17

Although suburbanization added more Republican than Democratic voters to the state’s electorate, these gains were indefinite since 1980 was the last general election prior to the next redistricting process. Hence, each winnable race for the Texas Senate and House would be strongly contested since those legislators elected in 1980 would redraw their own district lines in addition to those for the Texas members of the United States House of Representatives. Consequently, the Associated Republicans of Texas (ART), an ad hoc organization formed in 1975 to build grass roots support for legislative and local candidates, decided on a strategy to support only those races they thought were winnable with as much funding and technical assistance as possible. For instance, by 1980, instead of pumping in the usual one or two thousand dollars for a race, largely because of the efforts of ART Chairman Julian Zimmerman, aided by Governor Clements and John Tower – ART was supporting state senate races with amounts of $20,000 and upwards. Having never defeated an incumbent Democratic state senator in modern times, ART and the GOP sensed the time was ripe following the May primaries where in the combined vote of five metropolitan counties, which included Harris (Houston), Dallas, Bexar (San Antonio), Tarrant (Fort Worth) and Travis (Austin), the GOP led the

Democrats by almost 70,000 votes. Particularly encouraging to Republicans was the defeat of conservative Democratic Senator Bill Moore of Bryan representing District 5, also known as the dean of the Senate, who lost his primary to Kent Caperton, a liberal. This was largely because of the suburbanization occurring in Montgomery and Harris counties, where most of the conservatives voted in the GOP primary. 18

Although the emphasis was on the state senate, ART also targeted at least thirty-five House races they thought winnable. Fueling ART and the GOP were such fundraisers as the “Lone Star Tribute,” a tremendous fundraising event held in Houston on September 16. In attendance were former President Ford; Reagan, the recently named nominee for President; Governor Clements; Bush, the nominee for Vice President; former Ambassador Anne Armstrong; former Governor Connally; and Senator John Tower. Some 2,500 enthusiastic supporters, including former Dallas Cowboy quarterback Roger Staubach, paid $1,000 a plate for the full-dress dinner. After netting a record-breaking $2.5 million, Jan Naylor, the Republican Party’s finance director was quoted as saying the event “made political history in the U.S. in that it was the biggest political fundraiser ever held.” The fattening of Republican coffers for the 1980 elections could also be attributed to the rebound of Texas oil, which began deepening the pockets of those Republicans tied to the oil business. A perfect example was Texas’s governor Bill Clements, who, while serving as chief executive officer of SEDCO, the largest offshore drilling company in the world, had not only amassed a fortune, but also created ties with many wealthy Texas oilmen. Serving as the campaign chairman for Reagan-Bush in

18 Knaggs, Two-Party Texas, 239-41.
Texas, Clements invested his political capital into the mobilization of grassroots Texas conservatives by raising over $2.5 million in funds, the most successful grassroots Republican operation in the state’s history. Hence, as Republican campaign funds reached unprecedented heights, so did the party’s confidence for victory. 19

As the Reagan-Bush ticket gained momentum and built a strong coalition, their Democratic opponent Jimmy Carter appeared to be in trouble. A devout Southern Baptist, President Carter had previously claimed the support of Christian groups across the South, but with the Democratic Party strongly in favor of legalized abortion and the ERA, that support began to erode, particularly in Texas. To exacerbate the situation, NOW began to demand that the federal government fund abortions for women who could not afford the procedure on their own. Moreover, when San Francisco homosexuals led “gay marches” and “gay parades” in order to demonstrate in favor of gay rights, more socially conservative Democrats across the South shunned the increasingly liberal and moral permissiveness stance of the National Democratic Party. Adding to the president’s woes was the continual downslide of the nation’s economy, which was directly tied to Carter’s lackluster energy policy. This was marked by record inflation of 18 percent that drove up the price of real estate, resulting in property tax increases of 120 percent. Unemployment figures climbed, the prime interest rate rose to 21 percent, and gasoline prices rose 52

percent while Americans grew increasingly discontented with the Democratic leadership.20

Republicans also capitalized upon President Carter’s foreign policy decisions. In a commencement speech given by the president at Notre Dame University in 1977, the president assured the students that anti-communism was a discredited policy of the past, and that Americans were “free of the inordinate fear of communism.” By 1979, however, the Soviet Union had greatly expanded its nuclear arsenal, established military bases in Southeast Asia and Africa, and invaded Afghanistan, which led to Carter’s unpopular decision for America to boycott the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow. In Cambodia, communist-supported forces committed genocide, murdering more than two million of their fellow citizens, while closer to the United States, the Soviets were supplying weapons and assistance to Marxist rebels in Nicaragua. Of the more than 1,169 acts of terrorism which occurred in 1980, many were perpetrated by groups armed and trained by the Soviets. In Iran, after overthrowing the Shah’s pro-American regime in 1979, Islamic rebels held fifty-two members of the American embassy staff hostage for 444 days. During the crisis, President Carter’s credibility as a world leader steadily deteriorated as signs and portents hinted increasingly at growing public impatience with the President’s “restraint” in dealing with Iran. On April 24, as rescue helicopters crashed

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in the desert in a failed rescue attempt killing eight, the president’s hope for reelection became even more unlikely. 21

Meanwhile, the Republican spirit in Texas continued to resonate fervently among conservative Democrats and Independents, who were dismayed by the Carter Administration’s economic and foreign policies, and felt alienated by the Democratic Party’s embrace of non-traditional lifestyles and abortion. Former Democratic Bexar County Judge A.J. Ploch and Harold Herndon, the co-chairman of former Democratic Governor Dolph Briscoe’s Bexar County campaign, threw their support behind the Reagan-Bush Ticket as well as conservative Democratic Senator Bill Meier, who represented the mid-cities area. Chairman of a statewide steering committee of Democrats and independents for Reagan-Bush, Meier told reporters that many of the state’s Democrats were dismayed with the liberal direction the party was taking, referring to its support of homosexual rights, gun control, forced busing and collective bargaining for public employees. “This is totally unacceptable to mainstream Texas,” Meier said. Although Carter’s outspokenness of his Christian faith surpassed that of Reagan’s, the Republican’s relationship with Texas’s religious establishment was much healthier, particularly in lieu of his opposition to abortion and the ERA. As the country prepared to go to the polls, Reagan implored citizens to ask themselves one question: “Am I better off than I was four years ago?” Many Americans must have answered “no,” because in the

November election Reagan swept the vote and captured the executive office, receiving 489 of the 538 electoral votes. 22

In Texas, Reagan garnered 2,510,705 votes to Carter’s 1,881,147, which constituted 56 percent of the vote out of a record turnout of 4.5 million voters, nearly seventy percent of the electorate. More impressively, however, the state GOP reached a milestone when it dethroned three incumbent Democratic state senators. In District 7, which included Fort Bend and part of Harris County, Republican Mike Richards defeated Democratic incumbent Gene Jones with 74,368 votes to Jones’ 67,691. In District 9, which included part of Dallas, Limestone, Ellis, and Navarro counties, Republican Dee Travis defeated the incumbent Ron Clower by a vote of 83,249 to 71,342. The most exciting race, however, was run in District 17, which included part of Harris, Aransas, Brazoria, Calhoun, Galveston, and Matagorda counties, where the long time incumbent and ‘Killer Bee’ A.R. “Babe” Schwartz, a “liberal’s liberal,” was pitted against Republican challenger Buster Brown. After running neck and neck for days, Brown finally received the break he needed on October 20, when Schwartz, who would become Dean of the Senate if reelected, threw a punch at an attorney in a Galveston courtroom. Reliving the episode, Schwartz exacerbated his predicament by telling reporters, “I only hit him once.” In one of the closest senate races ever, Brown edged the long time incumbent 71,775 to 70,997, a 50.2 percent margin of victory. 23

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23 Kingston, Attesley, & Crawford, Texas Almanac’s Political History of Texas, 95; Knaggs, Two-Party Texas, 246; Texas Secretary of State. Elections Division, Canvass of Returns for State Senator General Election, Nov. 4, 1980, Box 041-63 (Texas State Library and Archives, Austin, Texas [hereinafter...
Brown’s stunning victory brought to four the number of GOP state senate wins in 1980. The fourth race was won by John Leedom, who defeated Democrat Ron Kessler 60,191 to 54,979 for the District 16 seat, which included another part of Dallas County. When added to the incumbents, the four wins in 1980 brought the Republican count in Texas’ senate to seven. Unsurprisingly, each of these victories constituted parts or all of Dallas and Harris counties, the areas where voter realignment was most rapidly occurring. The efforts carried out by ART and the State GOP also paid off in races for the Texas House in which the party elected thirteen new members, losing only one incumbent, for a new total of thirty-five Texas Republican House members. Of the thirteen new House seats, four revealed remarkable turnarounds since these seats went uncontested by Republicans in the 1978 mid-terms. These included District 13, Gregg County, where Mike Martin of Longview defeated Jimmy Mankins 16,628 to 15,003; District District 24, composed of Collin and Rockwall counties, where Frank Eikenburg of Plano defeated Bob Hendricks 35,030 to 21,819; District 47, composed of Bee, Dimmit, La Salle, Live Oak, McMullen, and Wilson counties, where Jay Reynolds of Floresville defeated Joe Moron 15,858 to 14,682; and District 67, Potter County, where Charles Staniswalis of Amarillo defeated Dee Miller 10,487 to 9,147. Republicans were also encouraged by other House victories which came in traditionally Democratic

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strongholds: District 37-B, Travis County; District 48-C, Nueces County; Districts 57-C and H, Bexar County; and District 72-A, El Paso. 24

Another big plus for the Texas GOP was the election of Jack Fields of Humble to the Eighth congressional seat, which had been held by liberal Democrat Bob Eckhardt of Houston since 1967. The Harris County area, then, became a disaster for the Democrats with the losses of long time Democratic incumbents Eckhardt and “Babe” Schwartz, plus several other lesser known figures among the liberal-labor forces. After the election, Republicans owned a record nine of Harris Counties’ twenty-three house seats and eight of Dallas County’s nineteen. The massive effort for the Reagan-Bush ticket also paid off in a number of local races with the Republicans electing 155 county officials to complement the substantial breakthroughs in the Legislature. Beyond the borders of Texas, however, the Reagan-Bush ticket helped bring about another stunning change, Republican control of the United States Senate, which meant that after fifteen years of tenure on the Armed Services Committee, Republican Senator John Tower would become its chairman, a big plus for Texas conservatives. Following the election, Babe Schwartz, licking his wounds and viewing Democratic debris around him in the Gulf Coast area, stated, “We now have a two-party system in Texas.” Others, however, believed Texas “still has a way to go.” 25

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24 Texas Secretary of State, Canvass of Returns for State Senator General Election, 1980, Box 041-63, Election Returns MSS; Strickland, “Significance and Impact,” 232; Texas Secretary of State, Canvass of Returns for State Representative General Election, 1980, Box 041-64, Election Returns MSS; Texas Secretary of State, General Election for State Representative,1978, Box 51, Election Returns MSS.

25 Knaggs, Two-Party Texas, 250-51; Texas Secretary of State, Canvass of Returns for State Representative General Election, 1980, Box 041-64, Election Returns MSS.
Although Republicans celebrated their gains, they did so cautiously, knowing that the divisive issue of redistricting awaited them with the convening of the new legislature. After each decennial federal census, redistricting is required for every state’s Congressional delegation and their Legislatures. The purpose is to adjust population changes into redrawn districts of relatively equal population, drawn in a manner not to dilute voting impact of ethnic minorities, defined in Texas as blacks and Hispanics. Renowned columnist Richard Reeves accurately described redistricting in Texas when he wrote,

Redistricting is the integral calculus of politics. Few people understand it, but those who do often have more impact on who is elected and who isn’t than famous speeches and fancy television commercials. Many, many elections are decided long before candidates are selected; they are won and lost on the basis of who is allowed to vote in a district. 26

In other words, because “181 foxes in the henhouse” looked out for their own interests, which entailed legislators trying to finagle any advantages for their districts, redistricting became the most partisan process the Legislature undertook. With three new congressional seats up for grabs in 1981 because of the state’s population increase, this scenario played out through Governor Clements’ determination that the legislature carve out a black congressional district in Dallas, which would assure an adjacent Republican seat; therefore, clashing with the determination of Democrats to protect incumbents Martin Frost and Jim Mattox. 27

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26 Knaggs, *Two-Party Texas*, 252.
In 1981, for the first time, however, Texas Republicans entered the legislative process of redistricting with political leverage although they were four votes short of being able to block legislation in the Senate. In Congressional redistricting, Clements took an active role in seeking a conservative plan to be hammered out by a coalition of Republicans and conservative Democrats in each chamber, along with the threat of a veto if his goal was not achieved. In effect, Clements was counting on conservative Democrats to achieve his redistricting goals, which Democratic Representative Betty Denton of Waco interpreted as many of her colleagues preferring to “play footsie with the Republicans.” Hence, the party realignment that was occurring across the state was just as visible in the Legislature. Although two or three new Republican congressional seats in Texas did not sound like a lot, when compared to the national pattern, the Republicans could easily pick up enough seats through redistricting to ensure that Jim Wright never became Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, which would be a tragedy for Texas Democrats. Legislators also knew that minor changes and finagling of plans could make a substantial difference in winning the ethnic vote. Thus, the term “gerrymandering” is still used to describe the act of diluting a political party’s voting strength through “creative cartography,” a clever drawing of maps to further that purpose.\textsuperscript{28}

At a Dallas fundraiser in September of 1979, Republican Tennessee Governor Lamar Alexander was quick to point out that the term gerrymandering accurately applied to Texas, where since Reconstruction Democrats had controlled the legislature. While 46

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 254; “Texas Since World War II,” \textit{The Handbook of Texas Online}, www.tshaonline (accessed July 13, 2012); “GOP Woos Minorities; The 67\textsuperscript{th} Stalls Out,” \textit{The Texas Observer}, June 12, 1981.
percent of those who went to the polls in 1978 voted Republican, only four of Texas’s 24 seats in the United States House of Representatives were occupied by Republicans. Gerrymandering charges were also made by *Dallas Morning News* columnist Carolyn Barta, who pointed to the 1978 election for state representative in both Dallas and Harris counties. In Dallas County, Republican candidates received 51 percent of the total votes cast, yet only seven Republicans were elected out of the 18-member delegation, while in Harris County, Republican candidates received 55 percent of the total vote cast, but only seven Republicans were elected compared to seventeen Democrats. Although Republicans gained in both the House and Senate in 1980, the district and county lines were still those which had been drawn to the Democrats’ liking in 1971. According to Barta, Democrats had traditionally tried to protect their members in redistricting by guaranteeing safe districts for Democratic incumbents and diluting Republican strength by packing Republicans into as few districts as possible. Thus in 1981, Republicans were committed to obtaining districts which more closely reflected their strength in the state. Black Democrats also aimed for the creation of predominantly minority districts, as required under the Voting Rights Act, which would reflect their strength as a voting bloc. This, in effect, set up an odd coalition of Republicans and black Democrats, both of whom were trying to change the state’s status quo. Hence, Democratic legislators were faced with a dilemma in trying to appease minority interests and protect incumbents, which could only be done by shortchanging Republicans. 29

Republicans only had seven members in the thirty-one member Senate and thirty-five in the 150-member House in 1981; however, because of the conservative Democrats they could still form effective coalitions, particularly for Congressional redistricting. Republicans also had the support of Democratic House Speaker Bill Clayton, the conservative Democrat whose support made progress in the House much better than in the Senate, where Lieutenant Governor Bill Hobby often appeared caught between party loyalty pressures. Hence, when Governor Clements put forth his party’s plan for Congressional redistricting, which added a new Republican black district in Dallas County, Hobby hesitated for knowing that Clements “was trying to eliminate Democrats Martin Frost and Jim Maddox as a matter of party loyalty” by diluting their districts. Added pressure came from an ad hoc committee known as “Texans for a Conservative Congress,” a powerful bipartisan pro-Clements group composed of forty-three prominent figures, including such potent conservative Democrat campaign financiers as Hayden Head of Corpus Christi, Walter Mischer of Houston, and H.B. Zachry of San Antonio. One of the cochairmen was Wales Madden of Amarillo, probably the most influential individual in the Panhandle. Madden’s group settled upon supporting a Congressional redistricting plan drawn by Senator John Wilson, a conservative Democrat from LaGrange, whose plan eventually replaced that of Clements. 30

Although Hobby’s senate passed Wilson’s plan by a vote of nineteen to twelve, it met stiff opposition in the House. When Clayton laid the bill before the House on August 8, it triggered one of the longest, most intense battles ever waged in that chamber.

30 Knaggs, Two-Party Texas, 253, 256-57; Betty Andujar, “Oral Interview with Betty Andujar,” OH 552 (University Archives, Willis Library, University of North Texas, Denton, Texas), 37.
Through hours of debate, Clayton worked diligently toward passing his version of the Wilson bill, a bit more conservative than that which passed the Senate. Although Clayton was determined to get the bill passed that evening, House rules required a two-hour break at midnight, during which anti-Clayton forces decided upon a Killer Bee maneuver whereby they would boycott the resumption at 2:00 A.M. If more than fifty members were absent, Clayton would be denied a quorum and could not pass the bill. Therefore, when 2:00 A.M. arrived, more than fifty of the anti-Clayton among the 150 representatives had disappeared, prompting the House Speaker to empower the sergeant-at-arms and the Department of Public Safety officers to round up the truants from anywhere they could be found. From 2:00 A.M. to 4:30 A.M., a few of them returned, and at 4:32 A.M., a quorum was present allowing Clayton to ram his bill home and send it to the Senate the following day for debate. On August 10, by an 18 to 13 vote, the Senate accepted Clayton’s changes and sent the bill to Clements for his signature. State Senator-D Lloyd Doggett of Austin referred to the passage of the bill as a “great victory for the Republicans.”

The victory was short-lived, however, as the anti-Clements forces brought suit in federal court, winding up before William Wayne Justice, the liberal activist judge from Tyler, along with two other Democratic judges, Sam Johnson and Robert Parker. Justice was a veteran of such litigation, having participated in the landmark decision in 1972 that changed urban areas from countrywide elections of state representatives to single member districts for the purpose of giving ethnic minorities more opportunities to elect

their own to the Legislature. Ten years later, however, he was receptive to a completely different argument put forth by the Democrats who wanted to make sure that blacks did not upset their “applecart” in the Dallas County Congressional delegation. Although the Democrats’ plan had the effect of excluding blacks, judges Justice and Johnson ruled in favor of the Democrats, which drew the ire of the Dallas news media, who had been following the issue closely. After an article in the *Dallas Times Herald* reminded its readers that it was a strong coalition of Dallas black leaders who joined with Republicans to fight for their own congressional district, an editorial in *The Dallas Morning News* followed:

As every schoolboy knows, the federal government is composed of three coordinate and equal branches—the judiciary, the judiciary, and the judiciary. Or does it merely seem that way sometimes, owing to the arrogance of federal judges like William Wayne Justice and Sam Johnson? Justice and Johnson, with Judge Robert Parker dissenting, have decreed that, never mind what the Texas Legislature says, nor even what the U.S. Supreme Court thinks, Dallas County will elect its congressman this year from districts gerrymandered by Justice and Johnson. . . growing numbers of Americans believe certain old-fashioned things, such as that we really do have a federal system, and that the Founding Fathers didn’t mean for it to be run by unelected judges.’  

Although Republicans carried the Congressional redistricting fight to the U.S. Supreme Court, Judge Wayne Justice’s partisan Democrat position in Dallas prevailed for the decade.  

Clayton took care of the House Republicans to their satisfaction with their own districts; however, the GOP took another battering in Hobby’s senate. Republicans contributed to their problems when rumors abounded that three incumbents would seek

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other offices; Walter Mengden – Harris County, for United States Senate, Mike Richards – Fort Bend and Harris counties, for state comptroller, and Dee Travis – Dallas County, for Congress. Moreover, Bill Meier, Democratic Senator of Tarrant County, who switched to the Republican Party in 1981, announced he would run for Attorney General in 1982, and Betty Andujar was rumored to be retiring. Therefore, with only three Republicans fighting to protect their seats, the partisan Democrats could maneuver more effectively to gerrymander the other GOP-oriented districts. The plan they adopted was so anti-urban and anti-GOP that Clements vetoed it; however, the subsequent plan produced by the Legislative Redistricting Board, which was composed of all Democrats, produced a similar anti-Republican plan that withstood extensive court challenges by ART and the State GOP. The plan not only diluted Republican strength, but ignored high growth areas and shattered county lines. Commenting on why Republicans were not accommodated in Bexar County, Democratic Representative Matt Garcia said that it was because the large estates they live in were “so far from each other that you can’t put them in the same district.” Although for Republicans the 1981 redistricting was an example of partisanship at its worst, Democrats could simply blame John Hill for getting them into the mess. “He should have won,” stated Jim Mattox.  

Meanwhile, Governor Clements’ reelection campaign found itself in a heap of trouble by 1982 after the world’s glutted oil market began to reek havoc upon the nation’s economy, precipitating the 1979-82 recession. Out-of control inflation forced the

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Federal Reserve to apply unprecedented restrictions in monetary policy, which drove interest rates to new highs, which in turn choked off government and corporate spending, plunging the United States and much of Europe further into the red. Texas oil, the engine of the state’s economy, “coughed, sputtered,” then slowly began to die as unemployment nearly doubled within a year’s time to reach a record high of 8.4 percent in October. The next year, the state’s largest independent bank, First National of Midland, collapsed, which was followed in the next decade by nine of Texas’s ten largest banks. Exacerbating the situation was the peso devaluation along the border areas resulting from Mexico’s worst economic collapse in fifty years. Mexico’s devaluation of its peso and nationalization of its banks sent border towns such as Laredo reeling. “The crisis has taken its toll here,” said Conrad Cruz, executive vice president of the Laredo Chamber of Commerce. He added that all businesses had been affected and that retail sales were “off from 50 to 100 percent.” U.S. Representative Kika de la Garza, D-Mission, estimated that Texas border business was off 75 percent as a result of Mexico’s economic woes. Also presenting problems for Clements was his challenger State Attorney General Mark White, who scored with the media when he accused Clements of dragging the campaign into the gutter when Clements publicized an old traffic arrest of White for drunken driving while a law student at Baylor University. “You’ll say anything and do anything to get re-elected,” White barked at Clements. 35

White also gained voters by promising not to raise taxes and vowing to do away with the fuel adjustment provision, which was allowing the utility companies to ravage Texas voters. Accusing Clements of having broken his promise to the voters four years ago to eliminate automatic pass-through fuel charges on utility bills, the attorney general stated, “Time and time again Bill Clements has sided with the big utility companies against the average Texan.” Clements was also hurt by GOP U.S. Representative Jim Collins’ effort to portray Senator Lloyd Bentsen as a liberal in his much publicized race to unseat the ten year incumbent. Collins’ charge against Bentsen prompted humorist Cactus Pryor to respond in the *Austin American Statesman* by saying, “Of course, Lloyd Bentsen is a liberal. Just as I told that commie Barry Goldwater.” The *Dallas Times Herald* said Collins’ charges were “just plain silly,” while Jan Jarboe of the *San Antonio Express* remarked that “the idea that Bentsen is a liberal is laughable.” 36

By the end of October, each of these factors had coalesced to form a centrifugal force of Democratic steam that was rolling across Texas’ political landscape. In spite of Clements spending a record for a Texas political race of almost $12 million and predicting he would “shellack” Democrat Mark White with at least 52 percent of the vote, White came away with 1,697,870 votes to Clements’ 1,465,937, approximately 53 percent of the vote. Adding salt to Republican wounds were Congressional results in which all three of the new seats went to Democrats. The GOP also took a hit in the State Senate where the gerrymandering by the Democrats resulted in a net loss of three seats.

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For instance, in the revamped 9th District, moderate Democrat Chet Edwards of Duncanville ran unopposed to replace conservative Republican Dee Travis. In the 12th District, also tilted Democratic via redistricting, former Fort Worth Mayor Hugh Palmer, a moderate Democrat, defeated Republican John J. Andujar, husband of Senator Betty Andujar, 58,667 to 47,259. Democratic Craig Washington ran unopposed in District 13, which was made heavily Democratic due to redistricting. Republican Walter Mengden had run unopposed in District 13 only two years before. Republicans gave up another State Senate seat in District 28, where Lubbock District Attorney John T. Montford ousted former Odessa mayor Jim Reese, 62,642 votes to 36,511. 37

In spite of taking a beating in the Congressional and State Senate races, Republicans managed to gain one seat in the Texas House, but in Collin County, where redistricting had divided it into three new Districts, Republican ascendancy became even more evident. For instance, in District 60, which included only Collin County, Republican Frank Eikenburg ran unopposed garnering 18,183 votes; however, in District 62, which comprised parts of Collin and Grayson counties, Democrat Bob Burd ran unopposed. In District 61, which included part of Collin and Denton counties, Republican Jesse Coffey lost a close race to Democrat W. Tip Hall 11,631 to 9,421 votes. Next door in Denton County, Republican Jim Horn defeated Democrat Charles Cryan 10,860 to 9,695 votes, while in Lubbock County, ‘Buzz’ Robnett easily held onto his seat. In Bexar County, George Pierce was joined by two more Republicans. Kae Patrick defeated Ellis

C. Shank 19,610 to 6,159 votes, and Alan Schoolcraft defeated Michael Bernard 18,261 to 5,937 votes. Also revealing is that Republicans became the majority in Dallas County’s House delegation while Harris County Republicans increased their numbers from eight to ten. 38

Though losing the governorship was a crushing blow, along with the other statewide races, the 1982 election was not a defeat in depth as some of the past had been. Thus, for the future, the Republican base in Texas was secure. That future seemed even more secure when in January of 1983, Phil Gramm, the “Boll Weevil” conservative Democratic congressman from Texas, resigned his Congressional seat, declared himself a Republican, and proceeded to win a special election on February 12. Boll Weevil was the term used to describe those Southern Democratic members of Congress who broke with their partisan leadership to give Reagan’s 1981 tax-cutting bill a victory. Joining Graham in his support for Reagan’s tax bill were eight other “Boll Weevil” congressmen from Texas, who although labeled “party turncoats” by the Democratic leadership, were simply another reflection of what was taking place within the Democratic Party. For his support, Gramm was stripped of his seat on the House Budget Committee, which led to his resignation and switch to the GOP. Gramm, who had been an economics professor at Texas A&M University, was elected to the U.S. House in 1978 and proceeded to build a strong base of support among conservatives. He co-authored the Gramm –Latta Budget, mandating government heavy spending reduction during 1982-1984, and several other measures to reduce federal spending. His switch to the Republican Party could not have

38 Knaggs, Two-Party Texas, 275; Texas Secretary of State, Canvass of Returns for State Representative General Election, 1982, Election Returns MSS.
come at a better time, because a few months later on August 23, Senator John Tower announced that he would not seek re-election in 1984, which left the door wide open for Phil Gramm. Thus, on September 22, Gramm made an official announcement that he would seek the Senate seat vacated by John Tower. 39

Although Tower’s announcement brought both sadness and surprise among the Republican ranks and his supporters, he still proved to be a factor in the upcoming election by heading the Reagan-Bush Texas re-election campaign. Since Governor Mark White had received approximately 86 percent of the Mexican-American vote in South and Southwest Texas in 1982, Tower immediately went to work in those areas. Tower’s activities picked up even more after the Democrats nominated the “avowed liberal team” of Walter Mondale and Geraldine Ferraro at their national convention in July. In response, the Tower team staged a Reagan-Bush rally for July 25 in Austin at Auditorium shores, a large open area adjacent to the south bank of Town Lake near the Hyatt Regency Hotel. Some 12,000 supporters gathered to cheer Reagan and Bush, who were joined on the stage by John Tower, Phil Gramm, Bill Clements, John Connally, and Allan Shivers, whose support of Reagan marked the fifth time for him to support a Republican presidential candidate. Reagan rallied his throng of supporters by reiterating to them that the Democratic ticket had moved “so far left they had left America.” The Democrats, he added, gave Texas “the back of their hand” by not nominating Bentsen for vice president.

Effectively depicting Democrats as big spenders who would raise taxes, Reagan also scored on substantive issues such as prayer in public schools and the need for a strong national defense. 40

Republican enthusiasm reached a crescendo at the party’s August 20-23 national convention in Dallas. Addressing a 17,000-person prayer breakfast at Reunion arena, Reagan echoed the sentiments of other Republican Party leaders by blaming the Democratic-controlled state legislatures that had redrawn congressional district lines for keeping Republicans out of power in the House of Representatives. On the subject of taxes, Reagan told the crowd, “our friends in the other party have never met a tax they didn’t like –they didn’t like or hike.” Moreover, by GOP convention time, problems had set in for the Democratic ticket, including those related to financial dealings by Ferraro’s husband and the abortion issue in which Catholic Ferraro’s pro-choice position contradicted the basic teachings of her church. *Newsweek* reported that Ferraro and her husband, New York real-estate entrepreneur John Zaccaro could end up owing the IRS as much as $250,000 in joint income taxes from a shady real estate deal in 1978. After classifying the tax revelation as “disastrous” for her campaign, Ferraro was then asked to explain her position on abortion because as a Congresswoman she was quoted as saying, “As a Catholic, I accept the premise that a fertilized ovum is a baby.” Catholic bishops found Ferraro’s pro-choice position on abortion both illogical and untenable. Reagan

campaign director Ed Rollins reacted to Ferraro’s shortcomings by saying, “Geraldine Ferraro may be the biggest bust politically in recent years.” 41

Fueling the fire of the Reagan-Bush campaign most vehemently, however, was the topic of most concern to the majority of Americans: the economy. Fortunately for Republicans, by the second quarter of 1983, America’s economy came to life. The final 10 percent tax cut in July stimulated consumer spending while the long-depressed automobile industry, helped by Japan’s voluntary quotas on car exports, began to boom, with annual sales reaching $13.6 million in 1984. As a result, the American people went on a great buying spree with consumer installment debt increasing as much in the first six months of 1983 as in all of 1982. Best of all, inflation remained under control as the economy expanded. Reagan responded to his economic critics by reminding them of the five things he had promised to do after entering the White House: cut taxes; reduce civilian spending; restrain and stabilize monetary growth; get rid of excessive regulation; and balance the budget. “Now I’m batting four out of five so far, and that’s .800 –pretty good hitting in any league that I know about.” Awed by the magnitude of the U.S. expansion, foreigners began investing tens of billions of dollars in the United States. By election time, Reagan could also take credit for sharply lower inflation and the nation’s most powerful economic expansion since the Korean War. 42

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In spite of the nation’s economic turn, Democratic presidential candidate Walter Mondale continued to paint the Reagan administration as a “government of the rich, by the rich and for the rich.” Commenting on the Reagan tax cuts, Mondale told his Democratic supporters, “he gave enough of his rich friends enough tax relief to buy a Rolls Royce—and he asked your family to pay for the hubcaps.” Exploiting the $174 billion budget that the Reagan administration still owned, Mondale told a crowd, “By the end of my first term, I will cut the deficit by two-thirds.” All of Mondale’s rhetoric, however, could not stem the tide of conservative Democrats and Independents continuing to switch to the Republican Party because of the liberal views of the Democratic presidential ticket. A group of about fifty noted Democrats and Independents in Texas decided to form a coalition named “Texans for Reagan,” which included former Democratic governors Allan Shivers and Preston Smith, as well as former U.S. Representatives Omar Burleson, Frank Ikard and O.C. Fisher. Explaining the impetus for the group, John Tower told a news conference that the Democrats’ platform “drives the national Democratic Party even farther away from the views of many Texans who have been accustomed to thinking of themselves as Democrats.” 43

The migration of noted Democrats to the Republican camp culminated when Texas House Speaker Bill Clayton announced his support for the Bush-Reagan ticket in the fall of 1984 although he did not officially switch parties until a year later. The final straw for the Mondale-Ferraro ticket, however, came on October 21 during the second debate in Kansas City when Reagan finessed the age issue by wisecracking, “I’m not

going to exploit for political purposes my opponent’s youth and inexperience.” On
November 6, Reagan-Bush ticket won a 49-state landslide capturing nearly 60 percent of
the nation’s vote. In Texas, the Reagan-Bush ticket garnered 3,433,428 of the record
5,382,704 votes for a landslide of almost 64 percent. Even more revealing were the
results of the state’s Congressional races, where GOP candidates won six races, three of
which were against Democratic incumbents that included: the Panhandle, the Thirteenth
District, where Beau Boulter, Amarillo attorney and former city commissioner defeated
incumbent Jack Hightower; the Twenty-sixth district, where Dick Armey, an educator-
economist at North Texas State University unseated the incumbent Tom Vandergriff; and
the high growth areas of the Fourteenth District north of Austin, where Mac Sweeney
surprised incumbent Bill Patman. The other three winners of the Republican “six-pack”
were: Joe Barton of Ennis, who won the Sixth District vacated by Phil Gramm; Larry
Combest, who won the Nineteenth West Texas District vacated by Kent Hance, who lost
his Senate bid; and the Twenty-second District, which included Fort Bend and Galveston
counties, won by Tom DeLay. Thus, with the unexpected Republican victories in the
Congressional races, it came as no surprise when Phil Gramm won John Tower’s Senate
seat by defeating his liberal Democratic challenger Lloyd Doggett with 59 percent of the
vote. 44

44 Bill Clayton Scrapbook, no. 2, Vertical File (Center for American History, University of Texas
at Austin, Austin, Texas); “Anatomy of the 1984 Election,” Dallas Morning News, Nov. 7, 1984; “Reagan
wins 49-state landslide; Gramm overwhelms Doggett,” Dallas Morning News, Nov. 7, 1984; Kingston,
Attlesey, and Crawford, Texas Almanac’s Political History of Texas, 95; “Democrats Keep Grip on House
Doggett’s primary race, however, has to be studied to further reveal what was taking place within Texas’s Democratic Party. In a six-man Senate primary, which also included the moderate-conservative Congressman Bob Krueger, Doggett lost a plurality of the vote by less than one percent to conservative Congressman Kent Hance, whom the Observer referred to as that “proud boll weevil,” who also joined Graham in supporting the Reagan tax cuts. Hence, according to the Observer, the run-off between Hance and Doggett would essentially be a “fight by the old guard to retain control of the plantation.”

Because of the personal enmity built up between Krueger and Doggett, Krueger threw his support behind the conservative Hance, who was also endorsed by almost all the major daily newspapers in the state, although the Austin-American Statesman was in Doggett’s camp. Still, Doggett managed to defeat Hance in the run-off by nearly the same margin that he had lost to him in the regular primary. Doggett took the populous counties of Bexar with (66%), Dallas (70%), El Paso (55%), Harris (65%), Hidalgo (71%), Jefferson (62%), Nueces (55%), Tarrant (63%), and Travis (73%). The urban vote, the Mexican-American vote, and the black vote defeated the rural and semi-rural, Anglo, conservative Democratic Establishment voters. Thus, nuclear freeze, feminist, and labor voters had strengthened the liberal Democratic coalition, which was gradually becoming Texas’s “new” Democratic Party. Moreover, Gramm’s victory over Doggett with 59 percent of the vote clearly showed that Gramm’s switch to the Republican Party had prompted more conservative Democrats to follow. 45

The gerrymandering of 1981 had rendered few opportunities for State Senate gains; however, Cyndi Taylor Krier, a young San Antonio attorney, made history when she won the Twenty-sixth District seat to become the first woman and Republican ever to be elected to the State Senate from Bexar County. Republican ascendancy in Texas was solidified by the gains made in the Texas House of Representatives where nineteen new Republicans were elected, representing a net gain of fifteen seats and a new total of fifty-two. In Dallas County, R-Bill Blackwood’s victory along with D-Ray Keller (Duncanville), who switched to the Republican Party in 1983, increased the total to ten of Dallas County’s seventeen seats that were owned by Republicans. In Tarrant County, Republicans gained two more of the county’s nine seats for a new total of four. Bill Carter won District 91 with 64 percent of the vote while Chris Harris won 53 percent of the vote in District 93. Republicans held on to their ten seats in Harris County while two of Bexar County’s three Republicans, George Pierce and Alan Schoolcraft, ran unopposed. The real surprise, however, came in the Austin –Travis County area, where Republicans unseated three liberal Democratic incumbents who had ruled for years. In District 47, which included Blanco, Hays, Llano, and part of Travis County, Anne Cooper defeated Democrat Bob Barton in a close race 24,069 to 22,496. Bob Richardson defeated his Democratic opponent Russ Tidwell 29,934 to 26,822 in another close race for District 49 –Travis County while Randall Riley defeated Noel Grisham 24,161 to 18,520 for the right to serve in District 52, which included Burnet and Williamson counties. Alongside Cindi Krier’s surprising Senate victory in Bexar County, the Austin –
Travis County area House upsets clearly revealed that Republican voters were beginning to have a noticeable impact upon regions once known as Democratic strongholds.46

Other House seats where Republicans cut into the traditionally strong Democratic vote included: El Paso; where Republicans did not contest three of the four seats in 1980, but won Districts 70 and 71 in 1984; Lubbock, District 83, where Ron Givens won 53 percent of the vote to join ‘Buz’ Robnett as the second Republican representative; Odessa, District 75, and Amarillo, District 86. In Collin County, Republicans continued to gain as Samuel Johnson ran unopposed while Ben Campbell won 63 percent of the vote in his race, thus allowing Republicans to own two of Collin County’s three seats. Thus, Republican ascendancy between 1978 and 1984 can be attributed to the Democrats’ failed effort at a split primary, while suburbanization, which was being spurred by the rebound of Texas oil, added a significant number of voters to the Republican column. Most importantly, however, Ronald Reagan’s brand of conservatism and the continued inability of Texas’s traditionally conservative Democratic and Independent voters to identify with a Democratic Party whose views were becoming increasingly liberal pushed Texas a bit closer to a two-party state. A couple of polls conducted in 1984 told the story. In June 1984, a Texas poll showed that 26 percent of Texans labeled themselves as Republicans, 32 percent claimed to be Independent, and 37 percent were Democrats, which showed that the Republicans had gained 18 percentage points since 1964, while the Democrats had declined 28 percentage points over the same

46 “Bexar Democrats Given Bad Beating,” San Antonio Express News, Nov. 8, 11984; Texas Secretary of State, Canvass of Returns for State Senate General Election, Nov. 1984, Election Returns MSS; Knaggs, Two-Party Texas, 297; Texas Secretary of State, Canvass of Returns for State Representative General Election, Nov. 1984, Election Returns MSS.
period. Another poll showed the composition of Texas’s Republican Party in 1984 to be 22 percent newcomers (ten years or less in Texas); 25 percent new voters (under 30 years of age); 28 percent switchers (23 percent former Democrats; 5 percent former Independents); and 25 percent loyal Republicans. 47

Although Governor Clements’ loss in 1982 and the redistricting battle may have caused Texas Republicans’ momentum to wane, it was not enough to cause it to stop. Consequently, the November 1984 election enabled Republicans to boast of record numbers in Congress and the State House of Representatives as well as becoming the controlling party in the states’s two most populous counties, Harris (Houston) and Dallas, both of which constituted nearly one half of the state’s population. Every Democratic judge in Dallas was swept out of office; every contested judicial race in Houston went to the Republican. In response to a popular belief that the Republican victories were simply a coattail effect of Reagan-Bush, well known Texas Monthly political columnist Paul Burka stated,

Don’t believe it for a minute . . . for the first time, the highest ranking Texas Democrat on the general election ballot, Lloyd Doggett, was a liberal . . . Doggett ran worse in the 229 rural counties than in the 6 biggest counties (40 percent versus 42 percent), which for a Democrat is unheard of 48

Following the election, Texas GOP Chairman George Strake summed it up best when he stated, “Texas conservatives have finally gotten the message that conservatism is not welcome in the Democratic Party anymore.” By 1984, however, the words of Houston


Chronicle columnist Bo Byers still held true when he asked, “Why is the governor the only Republican who has been able to win a statewide state office?” Thus, what would it take for more Republicans to get elected to other statewide state offices, and also to ease closer to parity in the Legislature where by they could legitimately claim two-party status? 49

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CHAPTER 8
EPILOGUE

Although the Reagan tax cuts and increased auto sales helped turn the American economy by the election and facilitate Republican gains, Texas was just beginning to feel the brunt of their economic woes. Throughout 1984 and 1985 as oil prices continued to fall and drill bits began whirring to a halt, Placid Oil and Penrod Drilling, the twin pillars of H.L. Hunt’s empire, were close to defaulting on their bank debts. Only half of Penrod’s rigs were operating, and those that were received rates of less than half of what they did at the height of Texas’s drilling boom. Penrod’s loss alone in 1984 alone topped one hundred million dollars. Meanwhile, Bunker and Herbert Hunt continued to sell off pieces of Placid, but by mid-1985, both Placid and Penrod had told the banks they might be forced to miss debt payments. Things got worse in July 1986 as the price of West Texas Intermediate crude bottomed out at $11.58 a barrel, particularly when compared to December 1985 when it was still at $27.23 a barrel. This caused Texas’s new wildcatters born in the 1970s to go bankrupt while all of the state’s industries and businesses tied to the oil business continued to lay off workers until Texas’s unemployment rate reached a record high of 9.3 percent in September. One of the most glaring signs of Texas’s sputtering economy was the once glorious Shamrock Hotel in Houston. Having hosted six American presidents from Eisenhower to Reagan and showcased Frank Sinatra and Milton Berle in its day, the Shamrock awaited its fate in May of 1987 as demolition teams prepared to bring one of Houston’s greatest landmarks along with its memories to
the ground. Hence, the economy would be the underlying issue in the 1986 Texas governor’s race. ¹

Meanwhile, the thought of many Republicans of running Clements against Mark White again likened to “sending Custer back to Little Big Horn.” Moreover, former Southern “Boll Weevil” Congressman Kent Hance, who had crossed party lines in 1981 to support Reagan’s tax cuts, and switched to the Republicans after losing to Doggett in 1984, was being heralded by Phil Gramm as the best gubernatorial bet for the Republicans in 1986. In the primary, however, Hance had trouble with the old-line Texas Republicans, who questioned his “true-blueness” as a Republican after he had publicly supported Walter Mondale. Thus, Clements won the May 3 primary overwhelmingly with 58 percent of the vote. After learning the hard way during his first term that his brash and “shoot-from-the-hip” style rhetoric did not as easily translate to the governor’s office as the oil fields, Clements needed to reinvent himself. But luckily for Clements, White was still governor when the state’s economy bottomed out in 1986, and oil prices dropped to $11.58 per barrel, thus causing White to shoulder much of the blame. As thousands of Texans lost their paychecks on any given month, White failed to advance any innovative solutions to relieve hardship. Instead, his administration passed laws providing health care for the indigent, unemployment insurance for farm workers, health

insurance for retired teachers, and other reforms which failed to address the state’s underlying issue of jobs. ²

White provoked the ire of the state public school educators when he appointed with H. Ross Perot, the wealthy founder of Electronic Data Systems (EDS) in Dallas, to come up with an educational reform package for the state, which ranked forty-second in the percentage of students graduating from high school, and well below national averages in teacher salaries and standardized test scores. Perot’s efforts, which resulted in the Educational Reform Act, provided a significant increase in salary for teachers but also established stricter guidelines for teacher certification and initiated competency testing for those already teaching, which did not set well with aspiring or existing teachers. Equally provoking to the school crowd, however, was a provision in the act named “no-pass, no-play,” which prevented those students with an average below 70 on any subject at the end of a six-weeks grading period from participating in their extracurricular activity until the end of the next grading period, provided they had met requirements in all their subjects. ³

The Educational Reform Act was met with stiff opposition from various groups affiliated with public schools. Parents resented the pressure put on their children by standardized tests and increasingly argued that the schools spent too much time “teaching the tests.” Moreover, teachers, particularly experienced ones, were insulted by

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³ Campbell, Gone to Texas, 452; “The Defeat of Mark White Sends a Message To the Democrats,” The Texas Observer, Nov. 21, 1986.
competency tests, while coaches and the thousands of Friday night fans across the state criticized “no-pass, no-play,” which, in effect, could determine a season since it would sideline student-athletes for six weeks. Governor White, who flunked algebra as a high school student, rephrased his “no-pass, no-play” strategy in mathematical terms for coaches and athletes: “They won’t have to worry about X, if you’ll do Y.” Suddenly, Governor White was sending a message across the state that passing English was more important than playing football, which was anathema to the thousands of High School coaches, whose livelihoods largely depended upon “keeping kids eligible.” Moreover, many parents and educators had seen firsthand that for many students, extracurricular activities, particularly athletics, provided them incentive for staying in school. Eddie Joseph, assistant executive vice president of the Texas High School Coaches Association (THSCA), responded to “no-pass, no-play” by stating that it “hurts no one but the youngsters. Sometimes adults just don’t want to say they made the wrong decision.”

Because White failed to effectively address the underlying issue of the economy while peddling his educational reform package, his numbers continued to slide at the polls. Meanwhile, the rejuvenated Clements was busy advancing a “six-point jobs plan” in a statewide television ad which convinced many Texans that he was the “jobs” candidate. Because Clements had effectively run SEDCO, the world’s largest oil-well supply company, he was able to convince thousands of unemployed voters that he could bring jobs to Texas. In the campaign, Clements talked about the need to “scrub the

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budget” and spend according to the revenues that were available. He repeatedly called on Governor White to sell his $3.1 million Japanese jet to help reduce the budget shortfall. But above all, Clements reiterated that he knew how to create jobs by always saying it three times, “Jobs, jobs, jobs.” As unstable returns from oil and gas taxes played havoc with state government revenue estimates, White was forced to call special sessions in August and September to deal with the budget shortfall. Consequently, only weeks before the election, the legislature was forced to raise the state sales tax from 4 1/8 to 5 ¼ cents and increase the gasoline tax temporarily from a nickel to fifteen cents a gallon, which allowed Clements to call White the “Governor of Taxes.” Clements’s campaign also benefited from a commercial asking, “What’s up with Mark White?” An answer would tick off “sales taxes, property taxes, gasoline taxes, franchise taxes, crime, tuition, utility bills, state spending, the budget deficit, unemployment, and small business failures.” A “ding” on the cash register followed each item on the up list. In the end, White was “dinged to death” as Clements won back the governorship with 53 percent of the vote. 5

From the Texas’s Observer’s viewpoint, if White had gotten as many votes as the Democratic Party’s candidates for lieutenant governor, or land commissioner, or commissioner of agriculture, he would have won. “All over the state people were voting for Democrats,” wrote the Observer, “but not White.” Once again, however, Republicans had the governor’s office, but Democrats continued to hold every other statewide state political office. With the lingering effect of Reagan’s coattails, however, Republicans still ran well across the state, further changing the political landscape from the bottom up.

5 “The Defeat of Mark White Sends a Message To the Democrats,” The Texas Observer, Nov. 21, 1986; Barta, Bill Clements, 329; Campbell, Gone to Texas, 453.
They also won counties with Bill Clements that had always gone Democratic. In East Texas, Lamar County (which includes Paris) voted for a Republican governor for the first time ever. Lamar County Democratic Chair Pat Murphy agreed that many East Texas Democrats would not vote much differently than Republicans on the issues, but “It’s just a matter of calling yourself one (a Republican),” he said, adding that most people he knew did not think they made enough money to call themselves Republicans. Clements also won traditionally Democratic East Texas by a 51 to 48 percent margin, while in South Texas, White held only a 52 to 47 percent advantage. The Baptist Belt also went more heavily Republican. For instance, McLennan County, (which includes Waco), went for Clements 24,951 to 19,266. The “old bastion” of solid Democratic strength, rural Texas, gave 59 percent of its vote to Clements. Hence, like 1978, Clements cut into a number of traditional Democratic rural counties. In 1986, however, because of resistance to teacher competency tests and fanatical devotion to high school football, the Democrats found even more “trouble in the boondocks.” In the end, however, it was Clements’s ability to convince more Texans that he had the correct formula for the state’s reeling economy that put him back in the Governor’s Mansion. 6

Although Texas’s Republicans recorded no victories in the state’s congressional races, they consolidated the gains they had made from two years earlier. All of their incumbents were returned as were all Democratic incumbents. In the only open seat, the contest in the Twenty-first District to replace Tom Loeffler, who had resigned to run for

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governor, Republican Lamar Smith won easily, leaving the partisan split in Texas’s United States House Delegation unchanged at 17 Democrats and 10 Republicans. Following the election, Royal Masset, political director of the Republican Party of Texas, stated, “Just to hold them is a major victory. You usually lose them in an off year. We’re right on target.” In the Legislature, Republicans also held serve although they picked up four seats in the House, bringing that total to 56. This number was significant because it rendered Clements veto-proof since Republicans controlled over one-third of the House votes. Moreover, Republicans had a net gain of 127 local government seats, which was the most in the nation. Thus, any doubts that party realignment was occurring in Texas were removed after the 1986 elections. By this time, it became clear that the majority of the members of the old school of conservative Democrats had either moved into the Texas GOP or retired from office, thus solidifying the liberal coalition as the new core of Texas’s Democratic Party. Because Texas Republicans had consolidated their gains from 1984, State Republican Party Chairman George Strake predicted that the GOP would become the “majority party in Texas by 1992.” 7

Likening his second term as governor to an “experienced driller,” Clements assured Texans they would benefit because they would have a businessman instead of a “career politician” and someone who “knows better how to meet a payroll than how to read a political poll.” Not long into his new term, however, Clements’s campaign pledge

to not raise taxes met a stiff challenge. As the economy continued to weaken and created a larger budget deficit, which the comptroller projected at $6.5 billion for the next biennium (1987-1989), Clements’s hand was forced. Unable to reach an agreement with the legislature on spending and taxes during the regular session, Clements finally had to threaten to shut down much of the state government at the close of a special session in order to come to one. To the chagrin of many of his die-hard supporters, Clements approved a $5.7 billion tax increase, which was the largest in state history. But even before Clements’s inauguration, legislative leaders Lieutenant Governor Bill Hobby and House Speaker Gib Lewis had predicted a tax increase was inevitable because of the state’s fiscal doldrums. Adding to his economic woes, Clements found himself embroiled in a political scandal for the first time after Channel 8 News aired a program in November 1986 interviewing a former Southern Methodist University football player, David Stanley, who confessed to having been paid by the university while playing, and that the payments had continued after the program was placed on probation in August 1985 for recruiting violations. During “Ponygate,” as it came to be known, it was learned that there were other player/benefactors besides Stanley. Although Clements was serving on the university’s Board of Regents at the time, he did not partake in the paying of the players or break any rules, but when made aware of the problem, he argued that the payments should be continued because they were a “commitment.” Consequently, the media had a heyday – “There is a certain twisted logic about having a moral obligation to
continue an immoral contract,” one wrote, which elicited a public apology from Clements.  

Fortunately for Texas Republicans, the state’s economic woes and Clements’s shortcomings did not disrupt their momentum heading into the 1988 elections, because by that time, signs of economic recovery began to be seen as oil climbed back up to $15 per barrel. In the spring of 1986, however, when the economy bottomed out, House Speaker Gib Lewis made the announcement that Texas could no longer depend primarily upon the oil and gas industry to finance state government. Thus, by 1988, economic diversification began to take up some of the slack from the state’s sagging oil and gas industry, which helped to reverse the prolonged downward trend of the state’s economy. One of the first signs of diversification that year was when the Semiconductor Manufacturing Technology corporation (SEMATECH), a consortium of private manufacturers, universities, and the Unites States Department of Defense, moved to Austin. Designed to meet foreign competition and assure leadership by the United States, particularly in the semiconductor industry but also electronics, SEMATECH sponsored the research, design, and development of advanced computer chips and manufacturing techniques. Its move to Austin stemmed from a multimillion-dollar incentive package offered by the city and state government and the University of Texas. Another big step for Texas into the world of “high-tech” and all of its economic ramifications came in November of 1988 when the United States Department of Energy announced plans to build the Superconducting Super Collider (SSC) near Waxahachie in Ellis County.

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Designed to crash subatomic particles into each other at high speeds, the SSC was intended to promote “pure research into the building blocks of matter.” Although the plan was killed by Congress in 1993, its initial announcement lured other business to the state. For instance, both GTE and Fujitsu, Japanese telecommunication companies, announced moves of large parts of their operations to the Dallas area in late 1988.  

By November 1988, the economy had turned enough so that Texans could turn their thoughts to the upcoming presidential election in which they once again would have the opportunity to elect one of their own, although a transplanted New Englander. Moreover, Vice President George H.W. Bush was no Reagan, so many were concerned that he would not be able to hold on to the “Reagan Democrats.” Also, many true conservatives did not see Bush as one of them. Richard Viguerie, one of the founders of the New Right coalition said, “Conservatives have never seen Bush as a conservative . . . We see Bush as part of the old-line Republican establishment coming primarily from the eastern wing of the Republican Party – big business, country-club-type of Republicans.” When asked about the Republican presidential nominee, Betty Andujar stated, “Bush never relied on the kind of people I like . . . he was more liberal than I am and a whole lot of Republicans are.” In spite of not fitting the bill of a true conservative, Bush was still a long way from the Democratic nominee, Michael Dukakis, the liberal governor of Massachusetts. The underlying problem posed by Dukakis’s candidacy was how the Democrats would win in the South and the West with a Massachusetts liberal, and even

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worse, with one who looked like “some Harvard guy out to pick your pocket.” One prominent Dallas Democrat told the Texas Observer, “My problem with Dukakis is, Joe Doe out there on the street will say, ‘Here is another Yankee liberal from back there where Ted Kennedy is from.’” A Democratic campaign organizer in Texas stated, “People don’t trust Dukakis, partly because he’s from Boston . . . and the ‘big spending liberal’ label that Bush had been using has stuck with a lot of people.” 10

Because the Democrats had never won the White House without carrying Texas, Dukakis picked Lloyd Bentsen to balance the ticket, knowing that Bentsen could at least give them some hope in the Lone Star state. “If there were a Yankee on the ticket with Dukakis, this state would have firmed up by now,” stated one consultant to the Bush campaign. Bentsen’s selection, however, provided a window to the South for the Democratic ticket, which was a contrast to Bush’s “hands-off attitude” on energy matters that angered many Texas oilmen. Dukakis also tried to bolster his hopes of winning Texas by appealing to the farmers, whom he charged Bush had abandoned. In the West Texas town of Idalou during October, Dukakis cast Bush as unsympathetic and indifferent to the plight of the farmers and pressed his own programs, which would invest $100 million in rural America if elected. While addressing the high plains crowd, Dukakis said that Bush’s farm policy could be summed up in five words: “the fewer farmers the better.” Dukakis’s campaign also aired an ad featuring a ringing telephone

that went unanswered in the office of the vice president and blasted Bush for abandoning Texas during its economic woes. Bush, on the other hand, was able to effectively counter Dukakis’s attacks with the “value issues” such as his support of gun control and being soft on crime after giving furlough to Willie Horton, a black man who had been imprisoned for murder. Republicans also questioned Dukakis’s patriotism and his commitment to a strong national defense. But Dukakis’s support of gun control was identified by political professionals and members of both parties as the “cutting issue” for Bush among the independent voters and the so-called Reagan Democrats. Ed Martin, executive director of the Texas Democratic Party conceded that Dukakis’s support of gun control was costly in “hunting-happy Texas,” where, according to Martin, “Texans would rather have their guns than a good job.”

In spite of Bush’s running mate Senator Dan Quayle of Indiana being labeled as “the biggest bomb” ever in presidential politics, Bush became the first sitting vice-president to ascend to the White House since 1836, sweeping Texas and the rest of the South. He carried Texas with 56 percent of the vote and the nation with 54 percent, which showed that Bush effectively won over middle and working-class voters, with whom Dukakis was clearly out of step. Bush won four of Texas’s five largest counties (Harris, Dallas, Tarrant, Bexar), while still benefitting from suburbanization. For instance, in both Montgomery and Denton counties, Bush received 69 percent of the vote, 63 percent in Fort Bend County, and a whopping 75 percent in Collin County. Still, Bush could not

match Reagan’s victory in Texas of nearly 64 percent from 1984, which showed that Texas voters still leaned a bit more toward conservative than moderate, while remembering Bush’s earlier endorsement of the ERA and abortion. An ABC News exit poll showed that nationwide 54 percent of the voters who identified themselves as Democrats who had voted for Reagan said they voted this time for Dukakis over Bush, which in Texas was largely because Lloyd Bentsen. But according to the Houston Chronicle, Bentsen’s candidacy also caused many Texans to split their ballots. While rejecting the Dukakis-Bentsen presidential ticket, they turned around in the Senate race and re-elected Bentsen to a fourth term with 59 percent of the vote, which equaled 3,149,023 votes. When compared to the 3,036,829 votes Bush received for president, Bentsen’s total gave him more votes than any candidate for political office had ever received in Texas. Hence, Bentsen’s numbers confirmed Bush campaign strategist Karl Rove’s statement that “Texans are fundamentally conservative.”

Bush’s victory in Texas, however, signified much more than simply another Republican presidential victory. It was the third consecutive presidential win for Republicans by a landslide margin, and also for the first time, Republicans could claim other statewide state office besides the governorship. For instance, Republican Railroad Commissioner Kent Hance and GOP Texas Supreme Court Chief Justice Tom Phillips, both of whom were appointed in 1987 by Governor Bill Clements, won their races. For

Hance, the third time became a charm. After losing his bid for United States Senator and then Governor, Hance became the first Republican in history to be elected to the century old commission, which regulates the state’s oil and gas, and intrastate trucking and surface mining. Tom Phillips defeated Democrat Ted Robertson with 60 percent of the vote to retain his seat as the court’s Chief Justice, but also winning races to join Phillips on the state’s highest civil court were Republicans Eugene Cook and Nathan Hecht, all of whom became the first Republicans in the twentieth century to be elected to the nine-member Supreme Court. “This is a great breakthrough,” said Governor Clements. Although Democrats maintained a 6-3 majority on the high court, Clements predicted that the three GOP members would join with conservative Democrats Raul Gonzalez and Jack Hightower to forge a new majority led by Phillips. 13

District and county court elections results were also encouraging to Texas Republicans, particularly in Tarrant and Dallas County. Only the re-election of two Democrat Justices of the Peace kept Republicans from owning all of the judgeships in Dallas County. In Tarrant County, Republicans had a clean sweep of the judicial races, thus giving them domination in the county for the first time ever. Following the election, County Judge Roy English, a former Democrat who switched parties in 1986, extended an invitation to all other Democratic judges to “come on over,” that it was “better to switch than fight.” Although some Democratic judges were tempted to switch parties in order to survive, others were not. Judge Michael Schattman, a Democrat Judge of the

348th District Court, said “No, I couldn’t look at my children and tell them I was going to run as a Republican.” Also, in the Fifth District Court of Appeals, which included Collin, Dallas, Grayson, Hunt, Kaufman, Rockwall, and Van Zandt counties, Republicans easily won Places 1 thru 7, and in Collin County, Republican Curt Henderson won the District Judge race with 72 percent of the vote, while both county judgeships were won by Republicans running unopposed. In fact, the last countywide office in Collin County to be held by a Democrat, Precinct 3 County Commissioner, fell to the Republicans, thus allowing them to consolidate their hold on the county. In Denton County, Republicans won contests for the Sixteenth State District Judge and for the 362nd State District Judge.

The same type of scenario was unfolding further South in Harris County, where in twelve contested county civil court races, one Democrat was left standing. Hence, contests for judgeships at the state and local level were also part of the unfolding story of party realignment taking place across the state. 14

While gaining in statewide state offices and as well as in the courts, Republicans lost two Texas congressional seats. One was District 13, where Democrat state Representative Bill Sarpalius defeated Republican businessman Larry Milner with 55 percent of the vote after the Republican incumbent Beau Boulter chose to challenge incumbent Lloyd Bentsen for his Senate seat. The other one was District 14, where Democrat Greg Laughlin defeated Republican incumbent Mac Sweeney with 52 percent

of the vote after Sweeney had defeated him by the same percentage two years earlier.

Explaining his defeat, Sweeney told reporters that District 14, which encompassed twenty counties south of Houston and north of Corpus Christi, is considered to be a “mixed bag,” – neither Democrat nor Republican, when compared to most districts in America that are “securely” one or the other. In the Legislature, however, Republicans fared better, although slightly. In races for the Senate, Republicans increased their totals from six to eight, and picked up only one House seat, bringing that total to 57. Still, Republicans had once again held on to what they had gained from 1984 in addition to adding three more statewide state offices. Moreover, having won two of the last three gubernatorial races and swept their third consecutive presidential race by landslide margins, Republicans could rightfully claim that they stood poised to replace the Democrats as the majority party of the state. Texas had become a two-party state. 15

In conclusion, after more than one-hundred years of Democratic rule, the Republican Party of Texas could say that it had finally broken through and made Texas a two-party state. George Strake’s prediction, however, that the Republicans would become the state’s majority party by 1992 did not pan out until 1998 when Republican George W. Bush won his second term as governor in a landslide over Democrat Garry Mauro with 68 percent of the vote, and Republicans gained a majority in the state Senate. Still, by 1988, the Republican Party of Texas had achieved something that for many seemed impossible, particularly in light of the 57th session of the Legislature in the spring of 1961

when there was not a single Republican among the 180 members, and the 66th session in the spring of 1979, when there were only four Republicans in the Senate and twenty-two in the State House of Representatives. Hence, the major realignment that occurred after 1979 can be largely attributed to the culmination of Sharpstown, rising oil prices, suburbanization, anti-feminism, and Reagan conservatism. Underlying each of these factors, however, was the increasing leftward tilt of the National Democratic Party and its influence upon Texas’s party. If the candidacy of George McGovern was not enough in itself to convince Texas’s conservative Democrats that the National Democratic Party was leaving them, then those of Walter Mondale and Michael Dukakis certainly were. Thus, by 1988, the old cliché that “I didn’t leave the Democratic Party; it has left me” rang even louder. Although nurtured by scandal, Ronald Reagan’s candidacy, and the economic and social changes occurring during the 1970s and early 1980s, the increasing liberal focus of the National Democratic Party continued to be the underlying reason for Texas’s predominantly conservative electorate realigning into a new Democratic Party with a liberal core and a Republican Party that was ready to challenge the Democrats for major party status. 16

Discussions of Republican ascendancy in Texas during the twentieth century, however, should also trace back to the prohibition era when the term “presidential Republican” was born. In the 1928 election, Herbert Hoover became the first Republican presidential candidate to carry Texas when he received 52 percent of the state’s vote

against the avowed anti-prohibitionist Democrat Al Smith of New York. It was the anti-
Al Smith Democrats, or “Hoovercrats” who persuaded other Democrats to vote for
Hoover but support the Democratic ticket for local, state, and county offices. Hence, the
precedent of switching parties to vote for a Republican candidate during the prohibition
era continued to manifest itself until the Republican breakthrough in 1988. Eisenhower
could not have won Texas in 1952 or 1956 without the help of the Democrats, and
likewise Tower in 1961, whose Senate victory was the “impetus for the real formation of
the Republican Party in Texas.” Facilitating both Eisenhower and Tower’s victories,
however, was urban growth, which accounted for the vast majority of votes for both
candidates. Although Kennedy’s assassination together with the help of Connally and
Johnson managed to curtail the exodus of Democrats to the Republican Party during the
1960s, there were still some migrants throughout those tumultuous years, especially in
light of Johnson’s Great Society and Vietnam policies. The flux of Democrats to the
Republicans picked back up in the 1970s, however, after Sharpstown and the presidential
candidacy of George McGovern kicked off a decade that would also foster rising oil
prices, suburbanization, antifeminism, and Reagan conservatism, all of which culminated
in 1984 to produce the greatest realignment of voters the state has ever seen. By 1988,
this realignment had not only consolidated, but also added three statewide state offices to
the Republican column, thus giving the state two-party status. Karl Rove could not have
summed it up any better when following the 1988 election he stated, “The Reagan-Bush
realignment has reared its wonderful head.” 17

17 Kingston, Attlesey, and Crawford, Texas Almanac’s Political History of Texas, 87; Norman D.
Republican ascendancy in Texas during the twentieth century also has to include the efforts of the Texas Federation of Republican Women (TFRW), which by Bush’s election in 1988 averaged more than 10,000 members who donated thousands of hours of their personal time each year to bolster the strength of Texas’s GOP, even during off-year elections. By the early 1990s, the TFRW ranked as the second largest federation in the nation, surpassed only by California. Hence, from the prohibition era until 1988, the decades were filled with various factors which played their own unique role in the Republican ascendancy of the state. Yet as much of a determining factor as each of these played, they only lasted for a certain period of time. The most important factor, however, that persisted throughout the twentieth century was the increasing liberal focus of the National Democratic Party and its subsequent influence upon the Democratic Party in Texas. Big government, federal regulation of state agencies, civil rights, labor unions, and non-traditional lifestyles were all ideas that clashed with the traditional values and beliefs of conservative Texans, whose ancestors had shed blood because of their affinity to states’ rights. Thus, the growing liberal focus of the Democratic Party was the underlying reason for Texas gradually realigning from a solid Democratic to a two-party state between the prohibition era and 1988. Texas would become a solid Republican state ten years later.  


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