
The Year the GOP Went South

How the 1964 Republican convention changed the face of the GOP

BY TAYLOR BRANCH

REPUBLICANS OPENED THEIR NATIONAL convention in the San Francisco Cow Palace on Monday, July 13. All three television networks covered the four-day national pageant more or less continuously, anticipating an abrupt regional and ideological shift of power toward Sen. Barry Goldwater's Western conservatives from the long-dominant Eastern business interests. There was little suspense beyond a slight possibility that Dwight Eisenhower, the only Republican president of the past 30 years, might throw his transcendent influence publicly against Goldwater. Eisenhower was known to resent Goldwater for calling his administration a "dime store New Deal," and privately he had threatened to renounce the Goldwater forces for reckless exploitation on civil rights, saying that if Republicans "begin to count on the 'white backlash,' we will have a big civil war." Rumors of a decisive Eisenhower statement quickened when his brother Milton delivered a passionate nominating address on behalf of William Scranton, the surviving alternative to Goldwater, but Eisenhower remained neutral to the end. He could not bring himself to split his party in support of Scranton, a sure loser to Goldwater, and he had never been comfortable speaking about racial harmony, anyway.

In his speech to the convention on Tuesday night,

Eisenhower himself stirred the passions for which he blamed Goldwater. "Let us not be guilty of maudlin sympathy for the criminal ... roaming the streets with switchblade knife," he declared. The Cow Palace came alive with roars of approval. ("The phrase 'switchblade knife' means 'Negro' to the average white American," explained a dismayed Roy Wilkins in a newspaper column entitled "Ike Struck Lowest Blow." Wilkins could only hope that a speech writer had inserted the sentence without Eisenhower's knowledge.) Eisenhower evoked still greater emotion when he attacked the press, urging his audience to "particularly scorn the divisive efforts of those outside our family, including sensation-seeking columnists and commentators, because ... these are people who couldn't care less about the good of our party." This time the delegates responded with standing cheers, many shaking angry fists at the reporters' booths around the Cow Palace.

Campaign historian Theodore White described the release of pent-up anger as a turning point for the convention, if not for the role and reputation of the American press. Before then, White contrasted the "well-dressed and well-mannered Goldwater delegates" favorably with "civil rightsers" marching and picketing outside the Cow Palace, but the Eisenhower speech opened the convention itself to confrontation. Goldwater delegates and the spectator galleries showered New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller with catcalls and boos when he tried to speak against extremism. Hostilities erupted on the convention floor. Afterward, neither the triumphant Goldwater conservatives nor the defeated Rockefeller-Scranton liberals smoothed their raging antagonism in the

TAYLOR BRANCH, a contributing editor of *The Washington Monthly*, is the author of *PILLAR OF FIRE*, from which this article was adapted. COPYRIGHT © 1998 by Taylor Branch. Permission by Simon & Schuster, Inc.

interest of party unity. "Hell, I don't want to talk to that son-of-a-bitch," Goldwater growled when Rockefeller called him to concede the nomination. *Life* magazine bemoaned the "ugly tone" of the entire convention. *The New York Times* called it a "disaster" for both the United States and the Republicans, saying the Goldwater nomination could "reduce a once great party to the status of an ugly, angry, frustrated faction."

On the morning after his acceptance speech, Senator Goldwater sought an audience with General Eisenhower, who was straying again toward rebellion over Goldwater's chief applause line, "Extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice." Echoing a widespread public outcry, Eisenhower demanded to know how Goldwater could see "extremism" as good politics when it smacked of kooks. More personally, he told Goldwater that the slogan reminded him of right-wing zealots who had called Eisenhower himself "a conscious agent of the communists" in the White House, which was "utter tommyrot." Goldwater stammered through several unsuccessful replies before trying a D-Day analogy. What he meant was that patriotism required sacrifice, said Goldwater, and that General Eisenhower had been the ultimate "extremist" for liberty when he sent the Allied troops across the English Channel against Hitler. This interpretation transformed Eisenhower's mood. "By golly, that makes real sense," he said with a smile of relief that nearly matched Goldwater's. Still, this close call within the Republican bosom shook the new presidential candidate, who resolved never to repeat his signature phrase during the campaign.

Newsweek pronounced the San Francisco convention "stunningly total — and unconditional ... an authentic party revolution, born of deep-seated frustration with the existing order, executed by a new breed of pros with a ruthless skill." Other mainstream outlets speculated about Eisenhower, the rejection of Wall Street Republicans, or Goldwater's poor prospects against Lyndon Johnson, but their excitements were mild beside the acute distress of Negro publications. "GOP Convention Spurns Negroes," cried the *Cleveland Call and Post*. "Negro Delegates to GOP Convention Suffer Week of Humiliation," headlined the Associated Negro Press newswire. "The Great Purge of Negroes," announced *Jet*. "GOP Negroes Washed Away by the Goldwater Ocean," said the *Chicago Defender*. Their focus was less on the Goldwater nomination itself than on the institutional rejection of cherished Republican fixtures such as George W. Lee of Memphis, delegate to every GOP convention since 1940, who had "seconded the nom-

ination of Robert A. Taft" in 1952. The San Francisco convention, sweeping aside Lee's credentials claim that he and 200 "regular" Negro Republicans had been railroaded out of the Shelby County caucus, seated "lily-white" delegations in Tennessee and every other Southern state "for the first time since Reconstruction Days," reported the *Pittsburgh Courier*, noting that the caucus of Southern Republicans, "to add insult to injury," named its hotel headquarters Fort Sumter. Southern Republicans re-formed as a homogeneous group. Of the region's 375 convention delegates, all were white and at least 366 supported Goldwater.

Minority observers mourned the loss of Republican stalwarts far beyond the sinecures and patronage posts of the South. In "Cal. GOP/White Man's Party," the *California Eagle* of Los Angeles protested a seldom-mentioned fact about Goldwater's victory over Rockefeller in the decisive June 2 primary: It gained convention seats and control of party machinery for a slate of 86 California delegates that "by deliberate choice" was exclusively white. Nationwide, by slating no Negro candidates and defeating most opposing tickets, Goldwater strategists whittled the number of Negro delegates to a minuscule 14 of 1,308, roughly one per hundred, in what newspapers called the fewest "ever to be certified to a Republican convention."

At the Cow Palace, the rolling invective that startled television viewers fell personally upon this tiny remnant. The *Cleveland Call and Post* reported that George Fleming of New Jersey ran from the hall in tears, saying Negro delegates "had been shoved, pushed, spat on, and cursed with a liberal sprinkling of racial epithets." George Young, labor secretary of Pennsylvania, complained that Goldwater delegates harassed him to the point of setting his suit jacket on fire with a cigarette. Baseball legend Jackie Robinson summarized his "unbelievable hours" as an observer on the convention floor: "I now believe I know how it felt to be a Jew in Hitler's Germany"

The *Chicago Defender* raised the Nazi analogy to a blaring headline: "GOP Convention, 1964 Recalls Germany, 1933." Editor John H. Sengstacke eulogized the lost tradition reaching back to the armies of Grant and Sherman: "The Grand Old Party, which fought against slavery, which kept the flame of hope burning on the altar of freedom ... which sustained the faith of Negro people ... is gasping its last breath in the Cow Palace." In the South, where Negro Republicans could imagine no substitute haven among Democrats, editors and owners of the few Negro newspapers writhed under the assault to their Republican identi-

ty. Atlanta *Daily World* owner C. A. Scott first denied the Cow Palace revolution ("Scranton on the Move"), then mitigated its effect ("stands to reason ... that the party as a whole will not be carried too far from traditional Republican principles"), then pretended it was good ("... may have a stimulating effect on the development of a real two-party system in the South"),

and finally called upon the scalded, soul-torn Old Guard to "hold the fort" no matter what. He praised the Negro delegates for deciding not to walk out of the Cow Palace in abject resignation. They had endured only a "graphic demonstration" of what Democrats — "the party of Bilbo, Eastland, Thurmond, Barnett, Wallace" — inflicted regularly through the past

Who's Who

BY SUSAN THREADGILL

Two of the more curious attackers of **Bill Clinton's** alleged adultery and lying were **George Will** and **Joe Klein**. Klein, you will recall, repeatedly lied about his authorship of *Primary Colors* and indignantly attacked those who said he lied. A few years ago, Will's first wife evicted him, throwing his belongings on the street in front of their home, after she learned that he was involved with another woman.

Is **Bill Gates** worried about the antitrust suit that the Department of Justice's **Joel I. Klein** has brought against Microsoft? It seems he just might be. To back up his 70 in-house lawyers, he has retained not just one but two of the nation's most prestigious firms, **Sullivan and Cromwell** of New York and **Covington and Burling** of Washington.

To back up the attorneys, Microsoft has a Washington lobbying team headed by **Jack Krumholtz** and has enlisted the service of two highly influential former congressmen, Republican

Vin Weber and Democrat **Tom Downey**.

Thoughts of hypocrisy naturally lead to **George Stephanopolous**. **Mickey Kaus** recently noted in *Slate* that in the 1992 campaign documentary, "The War Room," Stephanopolous "bullied and cajoled" a phone caller who proposed to release a list of Clinton paramours: "You would be laughed at ... I guarantee that if you do this you will never work in Democratic politics again ... nobody will believe and people will think you're scum."

Now that Stephanopolous has become a Clinton tsK-tsker on "ABC News," Kaus observes, "it's as if **Roy Cohn** went on television in the mid-1950s to soberly rue the damage wreaked by Sen. **Joe McCarthy** without any apology for his own role."

A straw poll was taken at the 25th annual Conservative Political Action Conference held recently in Arlington, Va. The result: **Steve Forbes** came out ahead with 23 percent, trailed by **George W. Bush** with 10. The significance of the poll, insiders tell us, is that these are the red-meat conservatives who dominate GOP caucuses and primaries. **David Keene**, the CPAC chairman, told **Ralph Hallow** of *The Washington Times* that the results, which more than doubled the 11 percent Forbes got at last year's conference,

showed that Forbes "has worked the hardest and spent the most to build a following among economic and social conservatives."

When **Bill Clinton's** friendship with **Vernon Jordan** first became news a few years ago, this column noted that they certainly had one interest in common. A recent article in *Newsweek* was more explicit: "Asked at a party earlier this year what it was he and Clinton talk about on the golf course, Jordan slyly replied: 'We talk pu—y.'" *Newsweek* is no doubt trying to be delicate, but those who are mystified should understand that two letters are missing, not one.

Curiously enough, before **Joel Klein** filed his landmark case against Microsoft, he had been suspected of being too soft on big business. At Klein's confirmation hearing, Sen. **Ernest Hollings** warned "we've got an antitrust fellow here who rolls over and plays dead."

We've noted that practically all the GOP presidential hopefuls are trying to hire **Ralph Reed**, the former head of the Christian Coalition. Now comes **Gloria Borger** with a report on just how far some of the fellows are willing to go to get Reed: "Both **Quayle** and **Forbes** have signed on to stump for some of Reed's congressional clients. Think