
I’m here as someone who has off and on, over the years, dropped in on southern politics to study specific politicians (H&S) in their constituencies. So I came to the B&B book with an in-and-out perspective; and that’s mostly the angle I will take in talking about it. But I also came to the book with another experience--that B&B’s (my rendering) previous book on Politics and Society in the South had given me a big chunk of the context in which I was able to make sense of and write about my travels with some politicians in Georgia. And so it is not surprising that this book has done the same--that it has provided more macro-level analysis within which I can make sense of some of my other off and on, micro-level observations of southern politics.

As a student of American politics and as a student of Congress, I’m an unabashed admirer of the book. I don’t see how any student of American politics in the last half of the 20th century can do without it. It tackles the most important transformation of American party politics since the New Deal revolution. It does so with a trained and keen eye for the interplay between historical conditions, contextual possibilities and political strategy. The Southern politics remarks (5/23/03)
scope and the sweep of the historical/contextual/political analysis is impressive and instructive: first, in terms of tracing developments over time, decade by decade, from the 50's to the 90's and second, analyzing the interrelationships and interactions among the various levels of political activity--from presidential to regional to sub-regional to state to constituency. At the lowest constituency level, my research intersects with theirs. And, as you might guess, their use of Congress and of congressional constituencies as centerpieces of their story is both persuasive and heartwarming. They rarely generalize without backing it up with the people and the districts they are talking about. When they do that, they talk to me. That’s the ground level intersection I want to talk about. [And I might add that it’s easy for me to work from their work because it is marvelous pedagogy. The authors tell you where they’re going, they go there and they tell you where they’ve been.]

Reading the book encouraged me to start pulling together some disparate material that is related to the Rise of Southern Republicans--constituency-level material that has accumulated in my files--virtually waiting there for B&B to give it a context. Like “five characters in search of an author”--only in my case three, characters in search of a context.

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The three examples I want to talk about come from SC. And the major point I want to make from my constituency level interest, is that the broad changes that B&B write are influenced by, and are reflective of, a lot of private calculations of a lot of individual political participants. And while it's hard to get at the private calculations of individual voters, it is possible to do a little digging into the private calculations of individual politicians—particularly calculations involving their political careers. By doing that, perhaps, I can add a little micro-level embellishment to their more macro-level story B&B tell.

The three SC members of Congress I know something about are Republican Floyd Spence, with whom I traveled in the early 70's, Democrat Butler Derrick, whom I interviewed in 1996, and Republican Lindsey Graham, Derrick's successor, with whom I have been traveling since 1995. All three apprenticed in the SC legislature before going to Congress. Spence is probably the most interesting historically; Graham the most important recently and Derrick something of a link in time between the Spence of the 1970's and the Graham of the 1990's and early 2000's. Spence is the ''breakthrough;'' Derrick is "southern smother;" Graham is "promising situations." If you take these three cases together, you get a good sense for the essential gradualness of the change that B&B

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In Chapters 5 and 6, Spence is described as a Republican “pioneer” representing a “breakthrough” district in the highly resistant Deep South region—one of a very few politicians in that region in the early 70's to “secure the overwhelming white support (urban-suburban and rural whites) he needed to sustain a long congressional career”--from 1970-2002 to be exact. My emphasis would be to add that it wasn’t just a breakthrough district, Spence made a breakthrough personal calculation. He was either the first or the second state-level elected office holder to switch from Democrat to Republican in SC. He switched parties in 1960, and he ran for Congress in that year as a Republican against a Democrat, and lost. It was the last Republican loss ever in that district. The Democrat who beat him, Albert Watson, switched to the Republican Party after the election; and he held the seat till 1970--whereupon Spence succeeded him. Here’s the way Spence described the calculations that led to his precedent-breaking decision.

I asked him if he was comfortable in the Democratic party when he entered politics as a state representative. “I didn’t know anything else. I had met some Republicans--at law school and at
meetings I attended around the country. But the Democratic party was all there was. Anybody could run in the primary and there was no talk about the party. No one got up and praised the Democratic party or argued about the party. I rationalized that I could vote as I wished nationally and vote for what I believed in locally, so that membership in the Democratic party was not a problem. But when I decided to run nationally, I could no longer rationalize. For if I went to Congress, I would have to vote to put people in power that I didn’t agree with, people whose views I did not agree with. So I changed.

Relatedly, he said at one point, “I think TV had a lot to do with it. It used to be that our delegates would go up to the Democratic National Convention and one knew what they did. They’d come back and say, ‘I talked with Adlai Stevenson. He has to talk the way he does, but don’t you all worry. He’s going to take good care of us.’ Then television came and our people could see Governor Byrnes being forced out of the convention. You couldn’t hide anything from the people anymore. And they lost a lot of their loyalty to the national party.”

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"I was the first Democrat to change political parties--before Strom Thurmond and before Albert Watson. I remember talking to Strom Thurmond about it in 1960. He said the southern Democrats came to Washington and voted Republican, that our people really thought like Republicans. I said to him that our people expected us to instruct them and to take the lead and that therefore we should become Republicans. He said 'it isn't time.' I changed anyway and ran for Congress and was cut up pretty bad. I guess it wasn't time. In 1964, Strom Thurmond announced as a Republican. When I heard that, I said to myself, it's time."

"They said, 'Floyd switched because of what he believed in. He did it when it was unpopular, before it was the thing to do. We might not agree with everything he says, but we respect him for standing up for what he believes in. He's not an opportunist. I think that's the image I have among many Democrats. And, of course, they know me from the legislature. We are still friends socially.'"

After 1974, I never saw FS again. But he followed through with the career calculation he made in that year. "I'm planning to stay where I am as long as I can and build up seniority," he said. "And hope that some day the Republicans might become the majority party." Which they eventually did; and there he was waiting to Southern politics remarks (5/23/03)-6
become the Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee.

When the "Republican Surge" described in Chapter 11 produced a southern majority among House Republicans in 1994, I went back to SC to hang out with one of the perpetrators, Lindsey Graham. And to help me put Graham in an over-time context—the sweep of B&B picture—I interviewed his Democratic predecessor, Butler Derrick, who won the Graham district in 1974 and held it for 20 years till he retired in 1994. As B&B tell it, Spence’s district was Deep South by geography, but New South because of its suburban, middle class and industrializing contexts. Derrick’s SC district, by contrast, was Deep South and Old South—rural, small town. And he was supported by the historic Democratic biracial coalition (as described in Chapters 5 and 6).

Derrick summed up his twenty years. "I took a district that was overwhelmingly Democratic and through twenty years of hard work, turned it into a district that is overwhelmingly Republican." He measured the change in a couple of ways. First, echoing B&B, the change was racial. "For a long time, the district had been becoming more Republican. And the catalyst was racial. For years and years, the Democratic Party was the party of the white man and the Republican Party was the party of the black man. Now that has

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been reversed. The Republican Party has become the party of the white man." When I asked Derrick how best an outsider could pick up on the relevance of race, he said it would be difficult because "racially tinged commentary" has gone "underground." I’ll come back to that notion in a minute. I was not surprised by the comment because I had already noticed that while Floyd Spence sometimes ran his mouth on the subject of black people, Lindsey Graham never did. On the other hand, Graham sometimes keyed a talk directly to biracial audiences, as Spence, during my visits, never did.

Butler Derrick’s second measure of change was economic. "When I first ran, the dominant industry was textiles. I calculated that 50% of the people in the district either worked in textiles or were dependent on textiles. That is not true any more." And when he talked about the district’s main non-textile industry—the Savannah River nuclear plant, he commented, "These people drink wet and talk dry. They take big government hand-outs, and as their income goes up, they think they have it made and they vote Republican." By contrast, he characterized his supporters as "minorities, textile workers, teachers and unions." His comments underscored the importance of economic change. [My friend, Nelson Polsby, has written about air conditioning as a necessary condition for change.

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And while I might ask B&B where they put air conditioning, it’s economic change that seems crucial to me.

Derrick’s personal career calculation was that he wanted to be a player in the Democratic Party in Washington; and he did become one of the most liberal and most influential of the southern congressmen, hanging on, as B&B tell us, through constituency service, and then retiring when running and cultivating became increasingly hard. “If I had wanted to,” he said, “I could have stayed in Congress forever. I could have been the Strom Thurmond of the House. If you come up here and don’t get too involved and go back home a lot and damn the government, you can get reelected. But that doesn’t fit with my values and I had no interest in doing it that way.”

Which brings me back to the most concrete example Derrick gave of the “underground” impact of race on politics. “It’s a subtle thing,” he said. “It is now not socially respectable for a young person rising up the corporate ladder to be a Democrat. The other day, a career-oriented young man from the district asked me for advice about joining a party; and I told him ‘I’d advise you to become a Republican.’”

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Which brings me to the career calculations of his successor, Lindsey Graham, a 36 year old, one-term Republican state representative, who jumped into the race for the seat the very day Derrick announced his retirement. As a friend said, “He went into the next room, said a prayer, came out and said, ‘I’m running.’” Graham was born and raised a Democrat in a textile mill town, where his parents ran a bar and restaurant. I was a Democrat, he says, “until the day I put my name on a ballot.” So why, I asked him, did you leave the party of your birth? And he answered in terms Butler Derrick understood.

I placed my bets. I had never been to a Republican meeting of any kind. I had always been conservative. I wanted to go into politics; and I asked myself what would I feel comfortable doing and where was the country going in the future. I looked at it like a business. It was a gamble. It would be hard to win as a Republican, but, if I did, I would be in the best possible shape for the future. It didn’t take a rocket scientist to see what direction the country was moving in. It was a risk; but not a huge risk since the Republican Party was the party of the future. Any young person who wants to go into politics in the South today will be a Republican.

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And the rest, as they say, is history—the history of an inveterate risk-taker; and now a U.S. senator; a history beyond today's subject. Except to add to the economic context in which Graham made his career decision—to return to the decline of textiles and factor in the arrival in rural up-country SC of the same change pattern—new industry, growing middle-class business-oriented community and what B&B call, "utterly safe white suburbia"—the same context in which Floyd Spence had made his decision a quarter of a century earlier. Except that instead of American firms like Allied Chemical, Carolina Eastman and General Electric, which invaded Columbia in the 60's, we have the North American headquarters for foreign-based Fuji film, Michelin Tires and BMW automobiles coming to Greenville and Spartanburg. Graham does, however, vote against fast track legislation in support of the textiles that remain. And, not surprisingly, Graham saw the Savannah River project people "wet or dry" as "the heart of the Republican Party in my district."

The Spence to Graham Republican story is one of slow change, at various rates in various places. In South Carolina, the Derrick story helps us to calibrate the change. The B&B book tells us all that and convincingly. My point is simply to reiterate that their more macro level reasoning has helped me to put some of my more Southern politics remarks (5/23/03)-11
micro level research fragments in a coherent context. The Spence/Derrick/Graham story is a kind of miniaturization of themes in the *Rise of the Southern Republicans*, with an emphasis on some facilitating individual career calculations and, perhaps, some economic contextual variables. A lot of Spences and Derricks and Grahams and their career calculations went into the many changes that B&B write about. And that’s the way I will now write about them. If my experience is any guide, their book will stimulate and shape the research of other occasional students of southern politics, too—and in ways well beyond what they have done for me. (I notice that they’ve already had exactly that effect on the outlook of David Broder!) And that kind of stimulation and shaping is the best that can be said about any piece of research.