

FALL FROM GRACE? THE BREAKUP OF THE
DEMOCRATIC PARTY AND THE RISE OF
REPUBLICANISM IN TENNESSEE,
1948-1970


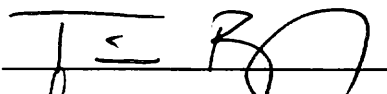
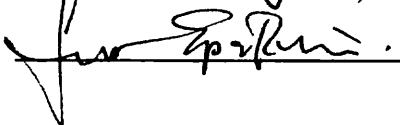
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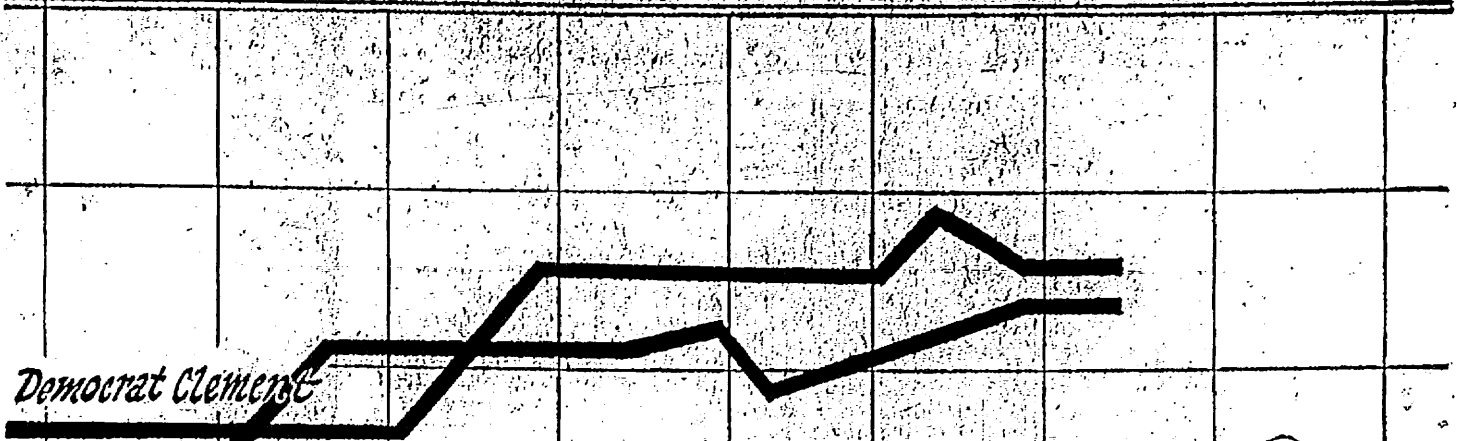
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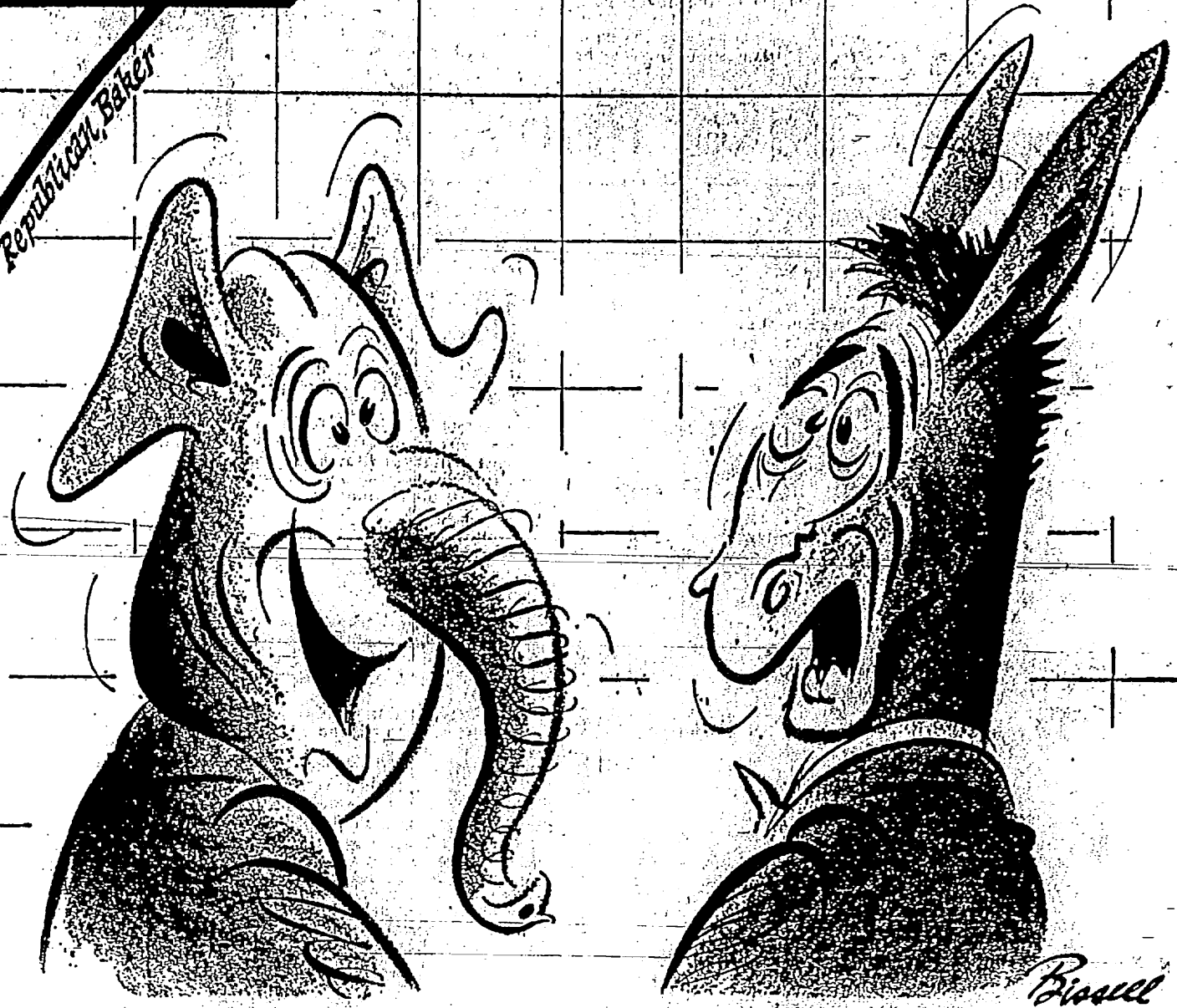
Punch Me, I Must Be Dreaming!

TENNESSEE POLLS



Democrat Clement

Republican Baker



Bissell

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List of Major Players and Interviewees

Howard Baker, Jr. (born 1925), U.S. Senator from Tennessee (1967-1985), first Republican Senator from Tennessee

William E. "Bill" Brock III (born 1930), U.S. Senator from Tennessee (1971-1977), defeated incumbent Albert Gore, Sr.

Frank Goad Clement (1920-1969), 41st Governor of Tennessee (1953-59, 1963-67), leader of conservative faction within Democratic Party

Edward Hull "Boss" Crump (1874-1954), mayor of Memphis (1910-1916), congressman from Tennessee's 10th District (1931-1935), political boss

Riley C. Darnell (born 1940), Tennessee state legislator (1971-1993) Secretary of State for Tennessee (1993-present) (*interviewee*)

Winfield Dunn (born 1927), 51st Governor of Tennessee (1971-1975), first Republican governor since Alfred Taylor (1921-23) (*interviewee*)

Buford Ellington (1907-1972), 42nd Governor of Tennessee (1959-1963, 1967-1971), leader of conservative faction within Democratic Party

Richard Fulton (born 1927), congressman from Tennessee's 5th district (1963-1975), Mayor of Nashville, Tennessee (1975-1987) (*interviewee*)

Albert Gore, Sr. (1907-1998), U.S. Senator from Tennessee (1953-1971), leader of progressive faction within Democratic Party

Douglas Henry (born 1926), Tennessee state senator (1971-present), representing Davidson County (*interviewee*)

John Jay Hooker, Jr. (born 1930), Attorney, Democratic nominee for governor of Tennessee, 1970, candidate for Democratic nomination, 1966 (*interviewee*)

William L. "Bill" Jenkins (born 1936), Speaker of the Tennessee House of Representatives (1969-1971), congressman from Tennessee's 1st District (1997-2007)

Eddie Jones (born 1924), press secretary to Gov. Frank Clement, 1963-67, editor of the *Nashville Banner* (1987-1998) (*interviewee*)

Estes Kefauver (1903-1963), U.S. Senator from Tennessee (1949-1963), leader of progressive faction within Democratic Party

McWherter, Ned Ray (born 1930), 46th Governor of Tennessee (1987-1995), Speaker of the Tennessee House of Representatives (1973-1987) (*interviewee*)

Merritt, Gilbert S. (born 1936), Senior Judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 6th Circuit (1977-present), finance manager for John Jay Hooker, Jr.'s 1970 race (*interviewee*)

James R. "Jim" Sasser (born 1936), U.S. Senator from Tennessee (1977-1995), manager of Albert Gore, Sr.'s final Senate race, Chairman of TN Democratic Party (1973-1977) (*interviewee*)

John Seigenthaler, Sr. (born 1927), editor and publisher of the *Nashville Tennessean* (1962-1991), advisor to John Jay Hooker, Jr. (*interviewee*)

Harry Wellford (born 1924), Senior Judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 6th Circuit (1982-91), chairman of Winfield Dunn's campaign (*interviewee*)

John S. Wilder (born 1921), Tennessee state senator (1959-1961, 1967-present), Lieutenant Governor of Tennessee (1971-2007) (*interviewee*)

Introduction

At the time he moved to Tennessee in the mid 1950s, Memphis dentist and native Mississippian Winfield Dunn had always voted for Democrats. The son of a Democratic congressman from the Magnolia state, it was the natural thing to do. “I grew up admiring my father...and for all intents and purposes as I grew up in Mississippi, I was simply a Democrat.”¹ He was, like most southern Democrats in those days, a conservative, viewing the world much the same as his father, grandfather, and maybe even great-grandfather probably had. In 1960, he purchased a copy of *The Conscience of a Conservative* by a Republican, Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona, upon its being recommended to him by a friend.² Ten years later, he packed up his bags, put his dental practice on hold, and moved to a house on Curtiswood Lane in Nashville, a mansion bought by the state in 1949 to serve as the Governor’s residence. His career in healthcare set aside, Dunn was prepared to enter public service as Tennessee’s first Republican governor since the 1920s.

Though Tennessee was not the first Southern state to elect a Republican statewide (Texas claimed that title with the election of John Tower to the Senate in 1961), it was the first to witness the complete loss of Democratic power after decades of domination by the party of Andrew Jackson and John C. Calhoun. On November 3, 1970, the Solid South witnessed the loss of its Democratic solidarity, in terms of the Party’s holding of statewide elected offices. For the first time since Reconstruction, all the statewide elected offices of a former Confederate state were held by the Republican Party. The state in which that occurred was Tennessee. In 1966, the first Senate seat had fallen to a Republican, Howard Baker, Jr. With the 1970 election, the

¹ Winfield C. Dunn. Personal interview. 2 October 2007.

² Winfield Dunn. *From A Standing Start: My Tennessee Political Odyssey* (Nashville: Magellan Press, 2007), 21.

remaining Senate seat and the governor's office went to Republicans Bill Brock and Winfield Dunn, respectively.

Since the end of federal Reconstruction in 1877, the Southern Congressional delegations had been almost entirely filled by members of the Democratic Party. This virtual law of southern politics held for nearly ninety years; in 1960, Democrats held 22 out of 22 Senate seats in the former Confederate states and 99 out of 107 House seats. In just forty-four years, the solid Democratic South had disintegrated; of those same 22 Senate seats, 18 were Republican in 2004, and out of 124 House seats, 82 were held by the Grand Old Party. Additionally, 8 of the 11 governors' offices were held by Republicans in 2004, as opposed to a unanimous Democratic stranglehold on the state house 44 years earlier.

This is a study of how, and more importantly, why Tennessee was the first state to leave the Solid South. There were a variety of issues and events that were factors in the breakup of the Democratic South as a whole which were just as much at work in Tennessee as they were in any other state: the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, the candidacies of Barry Goldwater and Richard Nixon, and the replacement of the Cotton Belt with the Sun Belt. All these phenomena affected the entire South, yet it was Tennessee that exhibited change first and most quickly. This thesis shows that the bitter split in the Democratic Party following the break-up of the Crump machine in Memphis, alongside individual errors in campaigns and by candidates and the development of an organized statewide Republican Party, resulted in the quick and early rise of Republicanism throughout the state of Tennessee.

As an historical trend, the breakup of the Solid South was an integral part of the history of the United States in the second half of the twentieth century, indelibly altering the electoral landscape and political culture of the nation. Beginning with the election of Dwight Eisenhower

as president in 1952, the peripheral South (Virginia, Tennessee, and Florida)³ started voting Republican in presidential elections. By the end of the century, the states which had made secure the Democratic majority in Congress formed the foundation of the Republican Congress which swept in during the 1994 elections.⁴ The successors to the legislators who brought New Deal programs, military bases, and economic revitalization to the South with Franklin Roosevelt helped Newt Gingrich pass a balanced budget, government deregulation measures, and articles of impeachment against President Clinton fifty years later.

As the first Southern state to gain a viable two-party system, then, Tennessee assumes a special place in this history. In many ways, Tennessee's earlier history foreshadowed the state's peculiar position in the breakup of the Solid South. Tennessee has always been an aberration from the archetypal Southern state. There were never many plantations in Tennessee. Tennessean students are always reminded that the state was "the last to secede, and the first to rejoin" the Union in the Civil War. Tennessee elected a Republican governor immediately after the war. Alone out of all the former Confederate states, Tennessee was never subject to Federal Reconstruction. The state has one of the smallest African-American populations in the South. The large Republican population of East Tennessee has always been a presence in state politics. All these factors and more set this state apart from the rest of the South, yet they cannot be taken as adequate explanation for the state's early electoral shift.

There is a vast body of scholarly work on the Democratic South and its breakup, by historians and political scientists alike. The most important work (if the number of times it is cited by others is any indication) is the nearly 700-page volume published in 1949 by V.O. Key,

³ The other two peripheral South states, North Carolina and Arkansas, did not vote Republican in a presidential election until 1968 and 1972, respectively.

⁴ Earl and Merle Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002)

Jr. (with the research assistance of Alexander Heard), *Southern Politics in State and Nation*. It provides the best comparison of the politics within the former Confederate states at the time just preceding the era of “massive resistance” to desegregation; of course, it gives no explanation of the Solid South’s demise, as it was written before that took place. Still, it has been invaluable as a source of information on Tennessee’s political character relative to the other southern states.

Unfortunately, the explanation of *why* things happened as they did in Tennessee has been lacking in the scholarly literature up to this point. The lack of attention has been noted by several scholars, and despite this recognition, little has been done to address the problem.⁵ This literature has provided a spate of reasons why the Democratic chokehold ended, ranging from the obvious to the obscure. Several particularly ambitious tomes have sought to address the change in the South on a state-by-state basis, in order to show the unique factors at play in each individual case. However, the results of these efforts have largely been unsatisfactory in the case of Tennessee, as the tendency to simply recount events with little or no analysis has proven irresistible. Likewise, coverage of Tennessee of any sort in these books is paltry compared to the attention lavished on the Deep South states.⁶

Thus, this work will serve to fill a sort of scholarly vacuum. This vacuum is not due to the subject’s lack of relevance. But it has developed nonetheless, because Tennessee did not experience the attention-grabbing and media-friendly violent throes of massive resistance which

⁵ Tim Boyd. “Out of the Shadow: Southern Democrats, Civil Rights and the Shaping of the New South, 1946-76” (PhD Diss., Vanderbilt University, 2007), 315.

⁶ Here are the works which have been the most useful (and which are cited most often by others and by each other): V.O. Key, Jr., *Southern Politics in State and Nation, a New Edition* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1977); Earl and Merle Black, *Politics and Society in the South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987); Black and Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, *The Transformation of Southern Politics: Social Change and Political Consequence Since 1945* (New York: Basic Books, 1976); William C. Havard, ed., *The Changing Politics of the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972); Alexander P. Lamis, *The Two-Party South, Expanded Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Dewey Grantham, *The Democratic South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1963); Grantham, *The Life & Death of the Solid South: a Political History* (Lexington, Ky: University Press of Kentucky, 1988)

made the experiences of states like Alabama, Mississippi and Arkansas so compelling. Rather, Tennessee moved into the post-Democratic and post-*Brown v. Board* era relatively smoothly, and experienced little of the protests, inhumane treatment, and federal intervention that marked that tumultuous period throughout the South.

Beyond Tennessee's status as the neglected state in terms of scholarly coverage, it may be that in the absence of distracting demagogues and rabid racist retaliation, factors of change which have gone unnoticed in other states can be seen more plainly in Tennessee. Thus, the trends identified and the lessons learned from this study (excepting, of course, situations involving individual candidates and campaign decisions) could possibly be applied to the South as a whole, just as many of the catalysts of partisan change described by other analysts are applicable to Tennessee. This likelihood makes the study of these events relevant beyond the sphere of those who are interested in the history of Tennessee; this serves as a contribution to the history of Southern politics as a whole and, indeed, United States history, as the South and its people have obviously played a large role in the affairs of the nation throughout its history.

This work depends heavily on two types of primary sources. First, contemporary newspaper articles indicate the atmosphere of the times without the addition of years of hindsight. The *Nashville Banner* and the *Nashville Tennessean* will be most heavily relied upon, as they represent both the Republican and Democratic points of view, respectively, and because they give a good view of statewide politics, being published in the capital. While other newspapers covered local politics well, generally, state politics were given coverage which was colored with an overly local bias. The two Nashville papers, on the other hand, did a better job of covering state politics from a broader perspective. Additionally, letters and audio recordings

from the Tennessee State Library and Archives and the Albert Gore Senate collection at Middle Tennessee State University will be employed.

The second and potentially more important type of primary source is a series of interviews conducted with journalists, politicians, and political operatives/activists who were involved in Tennessee politics during the 1960s and 1970s. Being a relatively recent time period, it is possible to find a great number of interviewees. The injection of direct personal perspective can be very helpful (not to mention enjoyable for the researcher), as not only memoirs, articles and other static sources may be consulted, but the opinions and memories of individuals who have had the benefit of reflection and hindsight to see their day-to-day actions in a broader light. While problems of bias must be addressed in working with interviews, the benefit of including these individual and experiential perspectives outweighs those problems. Nevertheless, those problems and the methods of selecting interviewees and interpreting their testimony merits discussion.

Oral history, while often interesting to the reader and the researcher, must be approached with a certain degree of caution. John Tosh, in his work *The Pursuit of History*, identifies three major problems with this type of primary source. First is the effect that the interviewer and interviewee have on one another.⁷ A retired politician or government official speaking to a young interviewer with no memories of the events in question has every incentive to help the researcher see things in a light favorable to the interviewee, as well as a good reason to say things in such a manner as to avoid offending others, with the possible price of not giving his or true opinion. Likewise, as an avid student of history and politics, I have found it easy to sympathize with and admire the people I interview. Thus, it is difficult yet very important not to let that admiration interfere with my interpretation of the testimonies given.

⁷ John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History* (London: Harlow, 1999), 198-199.

The second problem identified by Tosh is the effect of decades of experience and hindsight upon the recollection of the interviewees.⁸ In some ways, hindsight aids in giving the interviewee a better perspective on his or her actions, as mentioned above. For example, if an historian studying US-Soviet relations had spoken to the U2 pilot who took the photograph of the missile sites that led to the Cuban Missile Crisis right after he landed from his mission, the researcher probably would have heard something much less useful or relevant than if he or she had waited until a few months after the incident. At the same time, I have seen interviewees change what they say and avoid using the language that most accurately expresses their views because of the years intervening between the times they are describing and the present. For example, former Governor Ned McWherter was careful in describing his political beliefs: "I've always told everybody I was a fiscal conservative...but I'm not compassionate, I don't want to do Bush's deal; I think he's in over his head, bad. But socially, I've got more concern about trying to help people that need help."⁹ In this case, compassionate may have been the best term, but its association with a modern political figure (of the opposite political party) made it unacceptable to the interviewee, and thereby introduced a problem to the analysis of his testimony.

The third danger associated with oral history as described by Tosh lies in the assumption that the words and experiences of the interviewee comprise the sum total of the history of the events described.¹⁰ There are two important implications springing from this. First, it means that the facts provided by the interviewees must be checked against print sources, either primary or secondary. Second, it becomes necessary to get the opinions of others, when possible, to

⁸ Ibid, 199.

⁹ Ned Ray McWherter. Personal interview. 18 October 2007.

¹⁰ Tosh, 199.

provide a fuller view of events. This second fact was the primary factor in my selection of interviewees.

I have attempted to find a variety of political elites (of both parties), elected officials, public servants, and journalists who were active in the time period I am covering. My first few interviewees were either found by random chance or through the recommendation of friends and coworkers. From that point, I asked interviewees to identify others with relevant knowledge and experience (and who were accessible). A few other potential interviewees were identified through reading newspapers and other literature. By and large, I have found the people I contacted, even those still serving in public office, to be remarkably accessible and willing to talk with me. Each interview has lasted between about forty-five minutes and two hours. Every time, I began by asking a broad question, something like, "What do you think accounts for why the partisan shift in Tennessee occurred when it did?" From there, I asked for their thoughts on my ideas, asked in more depth about particular incidents or elections, and inquired about issues and experiences specific to each interviewee. The result has been the growth of a rich and fascinating body of information, personal opinions and anecdotes from fifteen influential figures who were active in politics during the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, and beyond.

This work will be divided up into five chapters. Chapter One gives the historical background for understanding the events which took place. Beginning in 1948 with the elections of Gordon Browning and Estes Kefauver to the Governor's office and the U.S. Senate, respectively, the Democratic Party in Tennessee experienced a widening of the rift between its two major factions, led by Senators Kefauver and Albert Gore, Sr. on the left and Governors Buford Ellington and Frank Clement on the right. A split of some sort in the party was ever-present and virtually inevitable throughout Tennessee's history as a one-party state.

Furthermore, it must be acknowledged that issues of race played a significant part in the creation and delineation of the division. However, the events surrounding the 1948 elections and the 1956 Democratic National Convention, in which Governor Frank Clement and Senators Kefauver and Albert Gore each had ambitions to national office, weakened the party as it moved into the 1960s.

Chapter Two follows the path of the Democratic split into the 1960s, and introduces the organized and invigorated Republican Party onto the scene. The 1965 struggle over the Speakership of the state Senate and the Lieutenant Governorship (which in Tennessee are held by the same individual) embarrassed the Democrats, as the legislative process was held up for weeks while the Senate Democrats tried to agree on a nominee. In the second half of the decade, Governor Ellington engaged in a series of activities which not only widened the rupture within the Party, but actually helped the Republicans in some cases. Both of these events served to weaken the Democratic Party to the point that the Republican Party could return to a level of strength unheard of in the South since the 1890s.

Chapter Three sets up Tennessee's situation in the context of the larger South and discusses the causes of the splintering of the Democratic Party in Tennessee and its effect on the electoral shift. The strong bifactional nature of Tennessee's Democratic Party (especially after the 1948 elections) was unlike any other of the former Confederacy's one-party Democratic states. Again, the competition between the factions was a constant in Tennessee for most of the period between 1900 and 1975, but unusual factors inside and outside the state colluded to make the split one which destroyed the Democratic Party's monopoly on power in the state. For example, disagreement between Tennessee's Senators Estes Kefauver and Kenneth McKellar (then President *pro tempore* of the Senate) in the halls of Congress over how the TVA should be

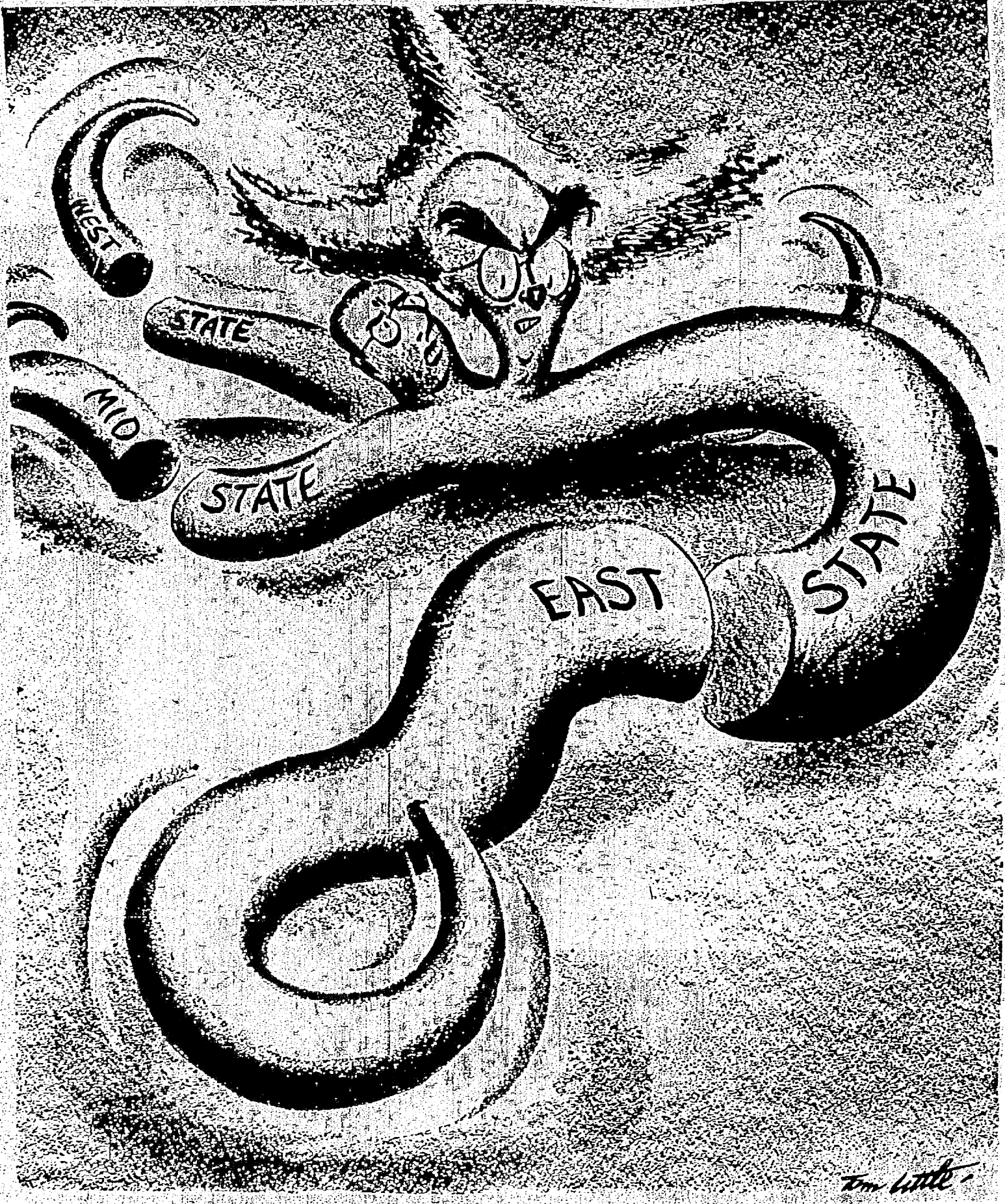
regulated, the fierce rivalry between Nashville's daily newspapers, the *Nashville Banner* and the *Nashville Tennessean*, and the way in which the ostensibly liberal Frank G. Clement became associated with the conservative wing of the Party all had a significant impact on the schism within the party.

Chapter Four takes a step back from the actions of the political elites in Tennessee to consider the shifts in voter behavior in the state during the mid-century and the way in which those shifts made an impact, specifically upon the state legislature. While Republican voting increased statewide during the 1950s and 1960s, the legislature's intentional failure to redistrict caused a severe under-representation of Republicans and urban voters in the state House of Representatives. This problem was brought into the national spotlight in 1961 by the United States Supreme Court decision in the case of *Baker v. Carr*, which originated in Tennessee's courts. Once redistricting had been achieved, the proportion of Republicans in the House of Representatives increased dramatically, to the point that by 1968, the lower House of the state legislature was evenly divided, with one Independent to cast the deciding vote. He voted Republican, and the Tennessee House of Representatives was organized by the Republican Party for the first (and thus far, the only) time in history.

Chapter Five focuses on the elections of 1970, which served as the real beginning of the two-party system in Tennessee. At that point, Tennessee's statewide elected offices became dominated entirely by Republicans, a condition which has only been duplicated once, from 1994-2002 (Governor Don Sundquist, Senators Fred Thompson and Bill Frist). The losses of Democrats Albert Gore, Sr. and John Jay Hooker, Jr. could be interpreted in two ways: either as a plenary repudiation of liberalism in the state, or as the consequence and culmination of two decades of growing division in the Democratic Party, exploited by the Republicans. As

Democrats such as Jim Sasser and Al Gore found electoral success within ten years of the 1970 elections, it is clear that liberalism remained politically palatable in the state. Finally, a conclusion briefly continues the narrative into the 1970s, summarizes the major points and reiterates the significance of the events described.

Death Struggle



Tennessean, Jul. 27, 1948

CHAPTER ONE

Buford, the “Boss,” and the Beginnings of the Tennessee Democrats’ Breakup

The middle two decades of the twentieth century witnessed the events which first caused the cauldron of Democratic politics to boil over into open dispute. Beginning with the defeat of Edward Hull “Boss” Crump’s ticket in 1948 and continuing through the events of the Democratic National Convention in 1956, the two factions of the Tennessee Democratic Party achieved roughly equal status (as opposed to the Crump faction’s previous dominance) and set the stage for the events of the next decade. In this chapter, I will discuss the incidents of 1948 and 1956 and introduce the four men who came to represent the two factions of the Democratic Party: Governors Frank Goad Clement and Buford Ellington representing the continuation of the conservative Crump wing, and United States Senators Estes Kefauver and Albert Gore, Sr. representing the progressive, anti-Crump wing. Additionally, the issue of race in the development of the factions must be addressed. While a great deal of issues were items of disagreement between the two sides, race, as a central issue in the formation and maintenance of the Solid South, played a part in the development of the factions in Tennessee, particularly manifesting itself in the debate over the poll tax.

The Demise of the Memphis Machine

On August 6, 1948, the *Nashville Tennessean*’s front page reported on the results of the primary elections in the state. In the lowest-placed column, the results of the Republican primaries were reported: Congressman B. Carroll Reece had won the Party’s Senate nomination,

and country star Roy Acuff was set to seek the Governor's office. However, this news was more or less a space-filler; the Republican Party had only been truly competitive in a statewide race once in Tennessee since the end of Reconstruction, in the early 1920s. The rest of the former Confederate states had been equally devoid of serious Republican activity. The eleven formerly rebellious states comprised the Solid South, where the Democratic Party was as much a part of life as was cotton and tobacco. The Democratic primaries were the source of the big headlines on this day.

An editorial cartoon near the top featured the flags of the United States and the state of Tennessee fluttering prominently at the top of the State Capitol, with the caption, "Oh Say Can You See...." Directly beneath it were an editorial entitled "Tennessee's Finest Hour" and another article entitled "Vote Debacle Stuns Shelby." Further over was the header, "Jubilant Campaigners Hail New Political Era." The headline on this apparently auspicious date read: "CRUMP MACHINE CRUSHED: Browning Victory Assured; Shelby Helps Kefauver Win."¹ The political machine of Edward Hull "Boss" Crump, which had selected the holders of most major offices in the state for over a quarter century, had suffered a defeat serious enough to spell the end of Crump's statewide dominance permanently.

Mr. Crump lost his potency when he chose to back Judge Mitchell out there in Cookeville instead of sticking with Tom Stewart [Clement's previous, successful, selection for US Senate]. That brought about Kefauver's election, and that's when Mr. Crump lost his stand. He got around still, and still had his machine down in Memphis...but that was the end of his statewide potency,

¹ *The Nashville Tennessean*, 6 August 1948, Sec. A, p. 1.

said state Senator Douglas Henry, who has served in the Tennessee General Assembly since 1956.² Mitchell was a minor player in state politics at the time, but Stewart had crossed the Boss, and Crump expected that his word would carry the same weight as it always had.

Six years, two months, and ten days later, on October 16, 1954, the relatively quick denouement of Crump's fifty-year political career came to a final conclusion with his death from heart disease in Memphis. An editorial in the *Tennessean* the next day summed up his career fairly well:

For more than 50 years of uninterrupted political activity Mr. Edward Hull Crump has survived. That he was an autocrat in Memphis and Shelby county,...cannot be denied. But it is also true that many of those who lived under his sway credited him with benign motivation. In varying degrees his influence was exerted in the state as a whole, in one era at least approaching complete dominance of Tennessee's affairs through the legislature and the governor's office.³

Crump's death sent waves across the state, as the *Tennessean* political system had just lost its central figure, who, despite his weakened condition, managed to "retain a strong measure of control of local affairs up to his death."⁴

The basis of Crump's power was his ability to get the entire voting population of Shelby county to vote as he wished. "All of those machine politics that you saw across the South, those folks were successful because of low voter turnout. [With] the Byrd machine in Virginia, ...the turnout was in the *teens*. ...And Crump, through his control of Shelby county, ...he picked all the legislators down there, he was really kingmaker," as Secretary of State Riley Darnell, the

² Douglas Henry. Personal interview. 9 July 2007.

³ Editorial article. *The Nashville Tennessean*, 17 October 1954, Sec. B, p. 4.

⁴ "Heart Disease Ends Long Rule In Shelby County," *The Nashville Tennessean*, 17 October 1954, Sec. A, p. 1.

state's administrator of elections, put it.⁵ As the most populous county of the state, Shelby, when acting and voting as a unit, could act in state politics much like the Solid South did in national politics, providing a strong foundational voting bloc that gave the chosen candidate a nearly insurmountable edge in the rest of the state.⁶ For example, even in 1950, after the rest of the state had begun to catch up in terms of the proportion of its population which voted, out of 481,271 votes cast in the Democratic primary for governor, 52,370 (10.9%) were cast in Shelby county, as opposed to 30,215 (6.3%) in Davidson County, the next largest metropolitan area in the state.⁷ By comparison, Shelby County was home to 482,393 of the state's 3,291,718 inhabitants (14.7%) and Davidson, 321,758 (9.8%).⁸ Though such a numerical advantage means little when the vote is split among multiple candidates, Crump delivered his people's votes as a unit: "In 1936,... Mr. Crump supported Gordon Browning for governor, and [US Senator and (typically) Crump ally Kenneth] McKellar supported Burgin Dossett.... The record shows that Browning received 59,874 votes in Shelby county to only 878 for Dossett."⁹

Thus, it was a void of monumental proportions that was created with the death of Crump. This void was not adequately filled by a Democratic leader or faction of sufficient strength or unifying ability, and as a result, the Republican rise was hastened. When asked about the impact of the end of the Crump machine and the Democratic confusion following it on the Republicans' fortunes, former Governor Winfield Dunn of Memphis, the first Republican governor since the Harding administration, had this to say:

⁵ Riley C. Darnell. Personal interview. 25 September 2007.

⁶ Earl and Merle Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 30-71

⁷ Reported in Numan V. Bartley and Hugh D. Graham, *Southern Elections: County and Precinct Data, 1950-1972* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 220-222.

⁸ *Tennessee Blue Book* (Tenn. Secretary of State, 1972), 277-78.

⁹ "Heart Disease Ends Long Rule In Shelby County," *The Nashville Tennessean*, 17 October 1954, Sec. A., p. 14.

It made all the difference in the world....Now when Crump died, suddenly in Shelby county and throughout parts of the state...there was a vacuum....When Mr. Crump spoke, everybody in Memphis did exactly what he said. My father-in-law was an example: 'Mr. Crump said he's alright,' so he'd vote for that guy! ...Suddenly, there was no political organization, it was *gone*. And suddenly, people voted the way they thought.¹⁰

Race and Factionalism

The division among the Democrats in Tennessee centered around many issues. Disagreement over the role of the TVA (as well as local oversight of the federal program) caused a fair degree of difficulty between Estes Kefauver and Sen. Kenneth McKellar (see Chapter Three). Likewise, by the late 1960s, the Vietnam War drew a line in the sand between liberal and conservative Democrats. But the question of race and civil rights played a role in not only the division among Democrats, but also in the creation and preservation of the one-party state in the South.

In fact, many argue that racial politics formed the very foundation of Southern consensus, and that all other issues were secondary to race. Key said,

We ought to be both specific and candid about the regional interest that the Democratic party of the South has represented in national affairs. It must be conceded that there is one, and only one, real basis for southern unity: the Negro...The maintenance of southern Democratic solidarity has depended fundamentally on a willingness to subordinate to the

¹⁰ Winfield C. Dunn. Personal interview. 2 October 2007.

race question all great social and economic issues that tend to divide people into opposing parties.¹¹

In other words, when race ceases to be an overriding concern, the natural division into real political parties begins anew.

In Tennessee, policies touching on race did form a dividing line among the factions that developed within the Democratic Party. The most significant of these was the poll tax. The *Nashville Tennessean*, media outlet of the progressive wing of the party in Tennessee, made opposition to the poll tax one of its central policy positions.¹² Likewise, Estes Kefauver, the prime representative of the liberal faction in the 1950s and early 1960s, voted against the poll tax, despite the protests of his fellow Southern congressmen, on the grounds that “A basic principle of democracy is the free exercise of the franchise.”¹³ The liberal opposition to the poll tax went back far beyond Kefauver’s tenure in Congress, as his biographer pointed out: “From the time ‘Crump men’ began occupying the governor’s office... a favorite plank in the platform of anti-Crump candidates was the repeal of the poll tax.”¹⁴

That being said, Crump’s espousal of the poll tax was not entirely motivated by the desire to disfranchise blacks. Rather, Crump used the poll tax to create the voting blocs which cemented his power. Though he defended it as a sure form of voter identification in an age before permanent voter registration, Crump’s biographer conceded that “his critics could point out that he profited politically from it. In Shelby County the organization saw to it that the poll taxes of the vast majority of the voters were, in one way or another, paid.”¹⁵ The unspoken

¹¹ Key, V.O., Jr. *Southern Politics in State and Nation: A New Edition* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977), p. 315-16.

¹² “History of ‘The Tennessean’ stretches back to region’s early settlement,” *The Tennessean*, 25 November 2007.

¹³ Estes Kefauver, quoted in Charles L. Fontenay, *Estes Kefauver: A Biography* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1980), 116.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

¹⁵ William D. Miller, *Mr. Crump of Memphis* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), p. 295.

agreement between Crump and the citizens of Memphis was that if Mr. Crump paid their taxes, they would support his candidates.

Beyond his position on the poll tax, Crump supported the States' Rights Party ticket in the 1948 presidential elections. Part of Crump's rationalization for this action was that Truman was a product of the Pendergast machine of Kansas City, Missouri; he saw that organization as completely different from his own, in that Crump's main objective was to make Memphis an efficient and clean city, and the Kansas City machine was entirely corrupt. But he added, "I will vote for a democrat next November, but it will not be for Truman. If Truman is nominated...Senator Harry Byrd...and another good Southerner...would undoubtedly sweep the Southern states...for the negro vote, [Truman] has endeavored to reduce the South to a country of crawling cowards."¹⁶ While he avoided the racial epithets and demagoguery of a Theodore Bilbo or a Ben Tillman, a conservative view towards race was a significant part of Crump's political philosophy, and a moderate opposition to those views characterized the anti-Crump forces.

Dramatis Personae

The Democrats of Tennessee had always been characterized by two main factions, divided along roughly geographic lines: "The hilly farmland of Middle Tennessee, whose 39 counties fan out from the state capital of Nashville eastward to the ridge of the Cumberland Mountains and westward to the lower Tennessee River, have tended to be more moderate...than West Tennessee, where there were more blacks and fewer white yeomen farmers."¹⁷ These two factions were once represented by the contest Crump and his office-holding retainers versus,

¹⁶ Quoted in Miller, p. 322.

¹⁷ Jack Bass and Walter DeVries. *The Transformation of Southern Politics: Social Change and Political Consequence since 1945* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), 286.

primarily it seemed, the editorial staff of the *Tennessean*.¹⁸ After the formal Crump machine ceased to exist, the factions nevertheless continued under the leadership of, on one side, Governors Frank Goad Clement and (to a much greater extent) Buford Ellington and Senators Albert Gore, Sr. and Estes Kefauver, as well as attorney John Jay Hooker, on the other.¹⁹ It was this combination of strong personalities and strong positions which was left behind to fight over the reins of Tennessean Democracy during the late 1950s and 1960s.

Initially an uneasy separation of forces prevailed, with the conservatives occupying the governor's office and the progressives going to the Senate. For eighteen years, Frank Clement and Buford Ellington "leap-frogged" one another as governor, as the Tennessee Constitution at that time did not allow for a sitting governor to succeed himself. Clement was not a die-hard conservative by any means; he was the first Southern governor to enforce integration, sending the National Guard to Clinton, Tennessee to put down segregationist protests. Likewise, he was staunchly against the death penalty, and refused to permit any executions during his terms in office.²⁰ He was, however, still a product of the Old School, "the Boy Orator of the Cumberland...with the Biblical phrases running from his lips, closing meetings saying, 'Take my hand, precious Lord, and lead me on'...He was an old-style orator, silver-tongued, and people came from everywhere to hear him speak, three, four thousand people turned out," said David Halberstam, writing in 1970 and giving a brief recount of Democratic leadership in the state.²¹ He confirmed his honorary position in the West Tennessee/conservative wing when he ran against, and lost to, Middle Tennessee liberal Ross Bass in 1964 for Estes Kefauver's Senate seat, a primary face-off he replicated in 1966, this time winning.

¹⁸ Staff, "Heart Disease Ends Long Rule In Shelby County," *The Nashville Tennessean*, 17 October 1954, Sec. A., p. 14; John Seigenthaler. Personal interview. 30 May 2007.

¹⁹ Bass and DeVries, p. 289.

²⁰ Gilbert S. Merritt, Jr. Personal interview. 31 October 2007.

²¹ David Halberstam. "The End of a Populist." *Harper's*, January 1971, p. 38.

Buford Ellington, on the other hand, was a confirmed conservative. Hailing from Mississippi, he had been Clement's campaign manager in the 1952 race, and fit in well with the Delta-like politics of West Tennessee. As Bass and DeVries write, "An oft cited story, perhaps apocryphal, is that after the 1952 election Clement and his campaign manager Buford Ellington paid a courtesy call on Crump, who reportedly told them, 'If you two play it right, you can keep this going for 20 years.'"²² Ellington won the nomination in 1958 in the typical Deep South manner of the time, namely race-baiting. As Albert Gore, Sr. observed,

The Democratic nominee for governor was the late Buford Ellington, an ex-Mississippian of extremely conservative views, who had won the nomination by a razor-edge vote in a four-man race during which he had declared, 'I am an old-fashioned segregationist.' There was much dissatisfaction in the Democratic Party about Mr. Ellington's nomination—not only among the liberal and progressive elements but also among moderates....²³

Moreover, he apparently was only an ambivalent Democratic partisan: "Ellington governed as a consolidator, rather than as an innovator, and he did almost nothing to build the Democratic Party during the years of the Republican upsurge."²⁴ Secretary Darnell took that description a little bit further: "Like they say, [Ellington was] the first really Republican governor in fifty years."²⁵ His contributions to the events of the 1960s which led to the Republican takeover will be discussed further in Chapter Two.

It has been argued by some, particularly William R. Majors in his short volume *Change and Continuity: Tennessee Politics since the Civil War*, that "the Clement-Ellington alliance

²² Bass and DeVries, p. 288.

²³ Albert Gore, Sr. *Let the Glory Out: My South and Its Politics* (New York: The Viking Press, 1972), 114.

²⁴ Bass and DeVries, p. 290.

²⁵ Darnell interview.

system was as strong as the old Crump-McKellar axis.”²⁶ While the Clement-Ellington continuation of the conservative wing of the Democratic Party was durable, lasting for nearly two decades, it could not compare to the strength of the Crump machine, which controlled both Senate seats and the State Capitol for decades. In the same vein of argument, one could say that except for a hiatus from 1970-76, the progressive wing of the party was in power in Tennessee from 1948-1994,²⁷ and was therefore “as strong as the old Crump-McKellar axis” in terms of durability, but such an argument would be equally as flawed as Majors’.

Estes Kefauver, at the other end of the spectrum, was one of the most liberal members of the Tennessee congressional delegation. However, he had a spectacular amount of popularity throughout the state, despite his stances on some controversial issues: “He was a Roosevelt Democrat, a Truman Democrat, a Stevenson Democrat, and a Kennedy Democrat. And many who followed him in his support of others were first, last and always Kefauver Democrats,” said the editorial obituary in the *Tennessean* following his death of a heart attack suffered on the floor of the US Senate.²⁸ His constituent outreach was the hallmark of his popularity; as former *Tennessean* editor John Seigenthaler wryly related,

I mean Estes was the only member of the United States Senate to vote prior to 1960 in favor of admitting Communist China to the United Nations. But his constituent services were so far superior to anything anyone had ever seen, I mean your name could not appear in a favorable way in a newspaper in Tennessee but you’d get a franked note from Estes reading about you. My wife was a professional singer, and she probably got a

²⁶ William R. Majors. *Change and Continuity: Tennessee Politics since the Civil War* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986), 92.

²⁷ Following the notion that Jim Sasser and Al Gore, Jr. were. in fact, descendants of that side of the party.

²⁸ “Nation, World Share State’s Loss Of a Distinguished Public Servant,” *The Nashville Tennessean*, 11 August 1963, Sec. B., p. 4.

dozen of those damned notes from Estes: 'Saw you were singing at Roy Acuff's cave, regards, Estes.'²⁹

Kefauver had a superb political gift, namely the ability to make every person he met think he agreed with him or her without having to say much, as David Halberstam related: "A farmer would ask him what he thought about Red China, and Estes would say, Well no isn't that interesting, what do *you* think of Red China, and so the farmer would tell Estes what *he* thought of Red China... That night, the farmer would go back to his wife and tell her that he had met the famous Senator Kefauver, and they had talked about Red China and the Senator had a lot of good ideas."³⁰

Beyond his ability to simply let people believe he agreed with them, Kefauver also never shied away from explaining his beliefs and voting record when questioned on it. For example, Kefauver was one of two Senators (along with Wayne Morse of Oregon) to vote against the renewal of the Smith Act, which outlawed political organizations (such as the Communist Party) which advocated the overthrow of the government, and which was later found unconstitutional. Despite the overwhelming popularity of the legislation, Kefauver opposed it on constitutional grounds and defended himself in those terms. It should not be assumed that this was the act of a Senator with seniority and years of incumbency, however. This vote occurred in 1953, the year before Kefauver's *first* reelection to the Senate, and he voted against the advice of his organizational leaders, who were later mentors to future Federal Court of Appeals Judge Gilbert Merritt, Jr. "Several of them said, 'Estes, you can't survive it; they're already calling you a

²⁹ John Seigenthaler. Personal interview. 9 July 2007.

³⁰ Halberstam, p. 39.

pinko and a red!'...He survived it, and he went on to explain to the people why he voted against it, why it was unconstitutional, un-American."³¹

Kefauver also had built a statewide political organization to partially fill the vacuum left by Crump. Two men, Charlie Neese and Frank Gray, headed the Kefauver organization, which even picked candidates for other statewide offices. However, after 1960 the organization's effectiveness declined, as Neese and Gray were appointed to the federal bench by President John F. Kennedy.³² Political organizations in Tennessee were very volatile: "There wasn't really an institutionalized Party...What happened was, Joe's group, when he died, or left town, or became a federal judge, it was his group of folks, and really not the Party, to carry on...I don't think [anybody created a lasting] political organization, it coalesced around an individual."³³ That very likely was a consequence of all the competition having come from within the Party for nearly a century. "That's what happens when one party has a monopoly," Governor Dunn asserted. "Competition arises, but it's not two-party competition...one of the principal reasons I was able to get so many Democrats to vote for me was that they wouldn't vote for the more liberal side of the Democratic Party, which was represented by my opponent."³⁴ One might ask why the Republicans were satisfied to remain in the Eastern part of the state, but the answer to that is that they had arranged patronage deals with the Crump machine for many years, and were not contested by the Democrats in their own region.

Albert Gore, Sr. had no such organization during his political career. Halberstam, in his coverage of the race for *Harper's*, described his effort in 1970 as "a lonely campaign...Little money, little help from established politicians—although he was a senior Senator...No

³¹ Merritt interview.

³² Seigenthaler interview, 9 July.

³³ Darnell interview.

³⁴ Winfield Dunn interview.

organization at all throughout the state. People help him during an election and then slide away.”³⁵ Part of this might be explained by Senator Gore’s aloofness; John Seigenthaler tells a story of a businessman who had dealt with the Kefauver organization often, who went about trying to find out how to reach Gore when he needed help. He was told there was only one person who was a close friend of Gore’s, and that man was a federal judge.³⁶ Whereas Kefauver was always perceived as a true man of the people, Gore was seen as very distant by the time of his defeat, even by those biased towards him, like Halberstam: “Albert wears his [ego] openly, almost naively. He is so pleased with being a United States Senator...It is not so much his ego which is on display, it is the U.S. Senate’s ego and dignity which is on display, which is why he seems at times aloof and untouchable. To affront Albert Gore is to affront the Senate.”³⁷

However, Gore was also known as a fine orator and a fiery populist politician. Beginning with his first race for Congress, he became known for his fiddle playing, and would often go out on stage with the country bands that opened his rallies before settling down to discuss the virtues of the TVA and Franklin Roosevelt’s foreign policy.³⁸ In 1940, he began a Sunday morning show on Nashville’s WSM radio station, informing his constituents (as well as millions of other citizens around the country receiving WSM’s 50,000 watt, clear-channel signal) of his views on the issues and telling them about the work he was doing in the nation’s capitol.³⁹ In these ways, he maintained his popularity without needing much overt political organization. In the days when the maintenance of a network of courthouse-square contacts was a near-essential manifestation of political power, Gore’s ability to appeal directly to the voters was remarkable.

³⁵ Halberstam, p. 42.

³⁶ Seigenthaler interview, 9 July 2007.

³⁷ Halberstam, p. 37.

³⁸ Kyle Longley, *Albert Gore, Sr.: Tennessee Maverick*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004; p. 38-39.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 47.

“Oh, no, not Estes!”

In the years between national conventions and other major elections, the balance of power remained relatively stable, with Clement displaying his oratorical gifts, Kefauver writing his constituent letters and fighting organized crime, and Gore playing his fiddle and studying the tax system. However, when the nation turned its eyes to Chicago for the 1956 Democratic National Convention, it saw a field of candidates for President and Vice President filled with ambitious Tennesseans. Kefauver had mounted his second strong bid for the presidency, but had again fallen to Adlai Stevenson in the primaries. Having run well, however, he was still considered a very strong contender for the second-place spot. Clement, likewise, had managed to land the choice assignment as keynote speaker for the convention (with the help of big Democrats such as former President Truman, who had few good things to say about Kefauver), and his supporters had arranged and prepared for the possibility of a floor demonstration demanding his placement on the ticket alongside Stevenson. Finally, Gore was interested in becoming Stevenson’s running mate, as well: “I, too, was thinking about the Vice-Presidential nomination. This made for a unique and unprecedented state triangle of ambition, pride, and politics...My champions included the late Sam Rayburn, Speaker of the House and the presiding officer of the convention...and a number of my Senate colleagues and former Congressional colleagues.”⁴⁰ As Governor Clement’s biographer put it, “Tennessee suffered from an embarrassment of riches.”⁴¹

The Tennessee delegation, officially led by the Governor, was comprised of a heavy majority of Clement supporters, with a few Kefauver friends mixed in. In the state convention

⁴⁰ Gore, p. 90.

⁴¹ Lee Seifert Greene, *Lead Me On: Frank Goad Clement and Tennessee Politics* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1982), p. 224.

held earlier, two important resolutions passed: first, that Tennessee's thirty-two votes would be cast as a unit, and second, that the delegation "was bound to support a Tennessean if he had a chance for the nomination."⁴² The leaders of the Clement group, state Democratic Executive Committeeman Herbert Walters, Buford Ellington, and Secretary of State Joe Carr (later to be sued over redistricting by a Mr. Baker), among others, were adamantly opposed to the ascendance of Kefauver to the Vice-Presidential nomination. Thus, when Clement's keynote address failed to produce the desired results, the presence of Gore made for an easy way out of supporting the other native son, Kefauver.⁴³

After the first ballot, Kefauver had a plurality of the delegate votes, 38%, and a nearly 180-vote lead over his closest rival, Massachusetts Senator John F. Kennedy. However, a simple majority was needed to win, and after Gore dropped out, many states started sliding to the side of Kennedy. The Clement-led Tennessee delegation, however, intended to continue with their support of Gore, despite his backing out, simply because Walters, Carr, et al could not suffer the thought of casting their votes for Kefauver. This was sure to doom Kefauver's bid for the Vice Presidency.

As the time approached for Tennessee to cast its votes, however, an extraordinary thing happened. Gore, under pressure from Kefauver supporters, rushed back into the convention hall and got recognition from Speaker Rayburn. His intentions were clear as he approached the microphone, and Governor Clement was heard to exclaim, "Oh, no, not Estes!"⁴⁴ Once he was recognized, "Gore...climbed on a chair...and bellowed: 'With gratitude for the consideration and support of this great Democratic National Convention, I respectfully withdraw my name and

⁴² Joseph Bruce Gorman, *Kefauver: A Political Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p.256.

⁴³ Gorman, p. 252-254; Greene, 238-239; Charles L. Fontenay, p. 270-271.

⁴⁴ Gorman, p. 258.

support my distinguished colleague, Estes Kefauver.’’⁴⁵ At that point, Rayburn, who had pushed the temporary speaker out of the way to recognize Gore, continued to recognize other delegations, Tennessee included, as they switched their votes back away from Kennedy to Kefauver and gave him the nomination. Apparently, Rayburn’s actions were highly unusual, as he had expressed support for Kennedy.⁴⁶ Either way, Kefauver won the nomination for Vice President, and the Tennessee Democrats suffered from an even deeper divide. With no further hotly contested elections in the decade (the governorship passed peacefully from Clement to Ellington in 1958), the intra-partisan divide continued unabated into the 1960s, the era in which the conflict bore its destructive fruit.

⁴⁵ Longley, p. 129.

⁴⁶ Gorman, p.258-259.

Counting on It



The *Tennessean*, Jan. 4, 1965: Gov. Clement and his "rubber stamp" legislature

CHAPTER TWO

Another Decade, a New Dawn for Republican Hopes

With the advent of the century's seventh decade, the Tennessee Democrats found themselves approaching a nadir in their post-Reconstruction strength. The Republican Party was organizing statewide at a previously-unheard of level of sophistication, while the problems within the Democratic Party that had originated in the previous two decades were exacerbated by further strife in new venues like the Tennessee Senate. Likewise, the bitterness at the upper levels of the Democratic Party evolved into an enmity which surpassed party loyalty as Governor Buford Ellington gave quiet support to Republican candidates in the 1966 and 1970 elections. With these moves, the stage was set for serious change in the political makeup of the state.

The Rise of Republican Resistance

As mentioned earlier, the Republican Party had a traditional base of strength in East Tennessee, but had virtually no support outside of that area. The First and Second Congressional districts had no trouble keeping Republicans in power, but real work had to be done outside that area in order to become competitive statewide. In the Third District, centered on Chattanooga, businessman Bill Brock initiated the growth of Republicanism. Grandson of a Democratic Senator from Tennessee, Brock was heir to a successful candy-making business. By 1956, he was active in Republican politics in Hamilton County, and six years later had organized the

county “to the point of having a volunteer worker for every 100 voters in many precincts.”¹ That same year, he ran for Congress. In order to get the conservative Democratic incumbent, James B. Frazier, out of the way, evidence suggests that a substantial number of Republicans voted in the Democratic primary (which is legal, as there is no party registration in Tennessee) to select the liberal candidate Wilkes Thrasher as the nominee. Between the 1962 and 1964 Democratic primaries, there was an increase of approximately 13,300 votes, suggesting the heavy Republican effort.² With the conservative population’s rejection of Thrasher, Brock won his seat by just over 2,000 votes.³

At the other end of the state, the Republicans of Memphis and Shelby County were growing beyond their former limits. The county Party had existed for decades, led by the so-called Old Guard, Lincoln-Taft Republicans who primarily consisted of African-Americans. The last black leader of the Shelby County Party was Lieutenant George Washington Lee, a World War I veteran and insurance executive. According to Judge Harry Wellford, a leader of the Shelby County Republican Party in the 1960s and manager of Winfield Dunn’s 1970 race, the Shelby County Republicans were allowed to exist under black leadership by Crump because he was “shrewd enough to say, well, if there’s a black man running the Republican Party here, [there are] not going to be many of the whites that are anxious to get into the Republican Party.”⁴ Though Wellford was of old Republican stock, he was the exception to the rule; white Republicans in Shelby County were few and far between in the days of Crump’s ascendancy.

¹ Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, *The Transformation of Southern Politics: Social Change and Political Consequence since 1945* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), 292.

² Norman L. Parks, “Tennessee Politics since Kefauver and Reece: A ‘Generalist’ View” *The Journal of Politics* 28, No. 1 (Feb., 1966), 150.

³ Richard M. Scammon, ed. *America Votes 6: A Handbook of Contemporary American Election Statistics* (Washington: Governmental Affairs Institute, 1966), 393.

⁴ Harry Wellford. Personal interview. 22 Oct. 2007.

This condition changed during the 1950s; Eisenhower and *Brown v. Board of Education* began driving suburban white voters to the Republican Party, especially in the area surrounding Memphis, the part of the state with the highest concentration of blacks. By the early 1960s, a New Guard of Republicans were organizing in Shelby County, under the leadership of Wellford and others. In 1962, the New Guard formed their own party apparatus, apart from the Old Guard and Lee, and offered a full slate of candidates for the state legislature, including their new chairman, dentist Winfield Dunn. Just as Bill Brock had organized the Republican Party in Hamilton County down to the precinct level, Wellford, Dunn and the New Guard started to conduct modern political operations in Shelby County: “We Republicans marched into the county courthouse and asked for the records of people who had voted in the Republican primary...They’d never had anybody come in and ask for things like that in Shelby County! And we’d take those names, and we’d put them in their precincts, and we’d go out and knock on doors,” said Dunn of their efforts.⁵ That same year, businessman Bob James ran against five-term incumbent Congressman Clifford Davis, “last Crump leaf on the political tree,”⁶ and only lost by 1,213 votes. While the race for the state legislature was wholly unsuccessful, due to the nature of the legislative elections in Tennessee (see Chapter Four), it was a bold start. In 1966, they finally succeeded in electing Dan Kuykendall to the House, the first Republican in the Ninth District since Barbour Lewis in 1873. Kuykendall had worked in sales for Proctor & Gamble, and was a “real salesman” for himself and the concept of two-party competition in a time where “it was routine that there were going to be contested races pretty much up and down the line in Shelby County,” said Judge Wellford.⁷

⁵ Winfield Dunn. Personal interview. 2 Oct. 2007.

⁶ Parks, p. 153.

⁷ Harry Wellford interview.

It should not be thought that the Republican rise was entirely harmonious and without strife. The Goldwater Republicans took over the state party apparatus in 1964 and sent, for the first time ever, an all-white delegation to the national convention. Norman Parker, a contemporary academic observer, described the New Guard as seeing a “necessity to reconstitute the Republican party as a lily-white, solidly conservative, business- oriented organization,” and as having “crushed opposition from the first and second districts with roughhouse behavior” and “[thrown] out the appeal of the Lincoln League of Memphis on behalf of Negro party veteran George W. Lee.”⁸

Judge Wellford, when asked about the link between racism and Republicanism, acknowledged that there was some connection:

I think Goldwater probably failed nationally...because Goldwater was identified with the old-line, Solid South, Southerners who could appropriately be identified with racism...and the more right-wing among the Republican supporters were not enthusiastic about looking for and seeking out black support. George Lee, for example, felt that the Republicans had really betrayed him. He had been a leader and the whites had sort of taken over there...But it was a difficult job...to go out and get black support.

But he insisted that politicians like Howard Baker, Jr. and Winfield Dunn did try to reach out to the African-American community; it was individual supporters, not the campaigns, who reinforced the stereotype described by Parker.⁹ Indeed, there is no evidence that Dunn or Baker made appeals to racial prejudice in their campaigns, despite the popularity of Parker’s type of argument.

In the end, it is clear that Republican organizational efforts paid off. In ten years, the Third Congressional District shifted from supplying a 8,000-vote margin in 1956 to a four-term

⁸ Parks, p. 153-54.

⁹ Harry Wellford interview.

incumbent Democrat (James Frazier) to giving Brock, a three-term incumbent, a cushion of 30,000 votes in an election with comparable turnout in 1966.¹⁰ Likewise, the Ninth District in Shelby County made a ten-percent jump in two years between defeating Republican Bob James in 1964 and electing Dan Kuykendall in 1966.¹¹ Through strong organization, the Republicans were able to exploit the growing weakness within the Democratic Party and set themselves up for greater gains at the end of the decade.

Partisan Peace in the Potty

V.O. Key, Jr., an astute analyst of Southern politics in the first half of the twentieth century, concurred with Governor Dunn's analysis of campaign/party organizations, confirming the analysis of Gore's difficulties. As he writes in *Southern Politics in State and Nation*,

Although the organization set up for the primary campaign in a one-party state serves the same purpose as party organization in two-party states, it is almost invariably less tenacious, less cohesive, less continuous...Local leaders closely identified with a particular candidate are called upon by their fellow citizens when communication must be had with the throne...A candidate's ultimate ascent to power (or its retention) is less certain than a party's and there is little adhesive influence within the factional organization other than personal loyalty to the candidate.¹²

Hence, there could be found rivalries similar to (but often more familiar in nature than) two-party competition within the Democratic Party, which surfaced in all sorts of fora, from national conventions of thousands to small governing bodies.

¹⁰ Scammon, p. 393; Richard M. Scammon. *America Votes 7: A Handbook of Contemporary American Election Statistics* (Washington: Governmental Affairs Institute, 1968), 377.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² V.O. Key, Jr. *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), 404-405.

One of the most visible and embarrassing instances of Democratic division took place in January, 1965, when the state Senate, a body of thirty-three members, met in session to organize itself for the 84th General Assembly. Like most (if not all) Southern legislative bodies at the time, the Senate was dominated by Democrats. Only eight seats were held by the Republicans, so when it came to selecting a Speaker and organizing the committees, the Democratic nominees were for all practical purposes the selectees of the entire Senate (a situation which reflected the reality of the Democratic primaries for statewide elections). Convening on January 4, both houses of the state legislature met to organize, and the next day, the House reported to the Senate that it was ready to conduct business.¹³ The same could not be said of the Senate.

In the 1964 general election, the progressive trend had continued in Tennessee's electoral behavior at the state and national level. Supporting Lyndon Johnson over Barry Goldwater (unlike the Deep South states), Tennesseans also elected liberal Ross Bass to the United States Senate, filling the seat which had been vacated by the death of Estes Kefauver. Bass had rather convincingly defeated sitting governor Frank Clement for the Democratic nomination. Clement also found himself repudiated to an extent in the halls of the state capitol: in the legislature, which had heretofore been widely referred to as a "rubber stamp" for the governor, so-called "independent" Democrats took up their seats.¹⁴ "We didn't have a legislature at all. We were just a rubber stamp...we didn't have a staff, [but we eventually] got study groups, we got staff, sub-committees and all

¹³ Tennessee Senate Journal, 5 Jan. 1965.

¹⁴ There is no apparent, easily proven connection between the statewide progressive/Kefauver/Gore wing of the Party and the Independents in the legislature, aside from the fact that the *Tennessean* supported both; however, their support of the Independents most likely stems as much from their opposition to Clement as from anything else.

that,”¹⁵ said former Lieutenant Governor John Wilder, underscoring the extent to which the General Assembly existed simply as a tool to formally enact the governor’s agenda.

An essential part of the governors’ success at getting their agendas passed over the decades had been the nomination of their preferred representatives to leadership positions in both houses, the Speakerships and Floor Leader positions. In 1964, Senate Speaker James Bomar had decided not to seek reelection to the Senate, though, interestingly enough, “legally, the Senate can select a non-member as Speaker.”¹⁶ Thus, the position became open to those 25 men within the Democratic ranks. Several senators expressed interest, but in the end, it was narrowed down to two contenders: Senator Frank Gorrell of Nashville, representing the Independents, and Senator Jared Maddux of Putnam County, a former Senate Speaker, representing the administration faction.

As the date approached for the Senate to organize, Governor Clement began courting votes for Maddux by inviting Democrats to his mansion to discuss the Speaker’s race. However, at 11:16 PM on January 3, the night before the first session, Gorrell’s faction, represented by fellow Nashville Democratic Sen. Robert Taylor, released a petition signed by thirteen of the twenty-five members of the Senate Democratic Caucus expressing support for Gorrell.¹⁷ The stage seemed set for an Independent-led Senate, a prospect which excited the editorial writers of the *Tennessean*: “The 84th General Assembly which convenes here tomorrow, holds for the first time in years, the promise of excitement and the legislative give and take through which the public will is molded into

¹⁵ John S. Wilder, personal interview, 21 Aug. 2007

¹⁶ Lee Seifert Greene. *Lead Me On: Frank Goad Clement and Tennessee Politics* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), p. 325.

¹⁷ Larry Daughtrey, “PETITION SHOWS GORRELL AHEAD,” *The Nashville Tennessean* 4 Jan. 1965, p. A-1.

law. But, the promise that the laws written in 1965 will reflect the wishes of the people rather than the wishes of one man, depends on an independent legislature.”¹⁸

However, the fourth of January was not to be Independence Day for the Senate. As the Democratic caucus met in the Senate chambers, the chairman of the caucus, Sen. William Flippin, recognized Sen. Taylor to speak: “Mr. Chairman, it appears at this moment that there is a member of this body, who is a duly elected Democrat, who has signed the caucus call, whose absence is unexplained, and he apparently is unavailable at the moment.”¹⁹ That member was Memphis Democrat Charles O’Brien. An investigating committee, chaired by Taylor, was appointed by Flippin and discovered that the Shelby county senator had collapsed at his Nashville apartment and struck his head. The committee had a doctor, “one of the best in the nation,” give him a check up, and that doctor predicted that O’Brien would be able to return to service the next day and cast his vote.

Sen. O’Brien did not show up. A letter was sent from him to chairman Flippin, stating that after consulting with his doctor, he “deem[ed] it essential to my personal health that I return to Memphis...I believe the interests of the government, and the people of Tennessee, will be best served if I were to abstain from voting in the Democratic caucus.”²⁰ On the floor, Sen. Taylor expressed his confusion in light of the report of the doctor the previous day,²¹ and the tension of the previous month of politicking broke loose. O’Brien’s fellow Memphians, Sens. Taliaferro and Pipkin, took issue with

¹⁸ Bill Kovach, “Independents Plan an Exciting Session,” *The Nashville Tennessean* 3 Jan. 1965, p. ?-1.

¹⁹ Senator Robert Taylor, floor speech (audio recording), 4 Jan. 1965. Tennessee State Library and Archives.

²⁰ Letter from Sen. Charles H. O’Brien to Sen. W.F. Flippin, reproduced in *The Nashville Tennessean*, 6 Jan. 1965, p. A-1.

²¹ Sen. Robert Taylor, floor speech (audio recording), 5 Jan. 1965. Tennessee State Library and Archives.

Taylor's statement, balking at alleged attacks on O'Brien's character and the "pressure" being applied by the Independents, and even threatening to walk out.²²

At this point, the main contenders Gorrell and Maddux spoke up, each claiming to be on the side of righteousness and truth while accusing the other of needlessly "dallying and delaying," rather than "get[ting] on the matter of the business of the people of Tennessee."²³ That day, the first of many votes was cast to nominate the Speaker, and the result, not surprisingly, was a deadlocked 12-12 vote. The next day, Maddux proposed two options for resolution of the deadlock: negotiations for a compromise candidate, or the movement of the race to the floor of the full Senate, to be decided by the Republicans as well as the Democrats. He preferred the former option: "I do not wish...that this matter be disposed upon the distinguished Republican delegation that the people of Tennessee have declared to be acceptable as members of this Senate...I think that as reasonable individuals of at least average intelligence...we should be able to settle this by negotiation and compromise."²⁴ Gorrell refused the compromise offer, confident that O'Brien would return to cast his vote for the Nashvillian.

When O'Brien finally did return on January 11, he initially refused to vote, citing actions by either side "bordering on blackmail" to get his vote.²⁵ The next day, he finally cast a vote, in front of the full Senate, for Senator Maddux. The Republicans had their own nominee to take on the Democrats' two, and the vote was split, 13 for Maddux, 12 for Gorrell, and 8 for the Republican. After some more wrangling, the Republican

²² Sens. Lewis Taliaferro and Joe Pipkin, floor speeches (audio recording), 5 Jan. 1965. Tennessee State Library and Archives.

²³ Sens. Frank Gorrell and Jared Maddux, floor speeches (audio recording), 5 Jan. 1965. Tennessee State Library and Archives.

²⁴ Sen. Jared Maddux, floor speech (audio recording), 6 Jan. 1965. Tennessee State Library and Archives.

²⁵ Bill Kovach, "O'BRIEN REFUSES TO VOTE," *The Nashville Tennessean* 12 Jan. 1965, p. A-1.

dropped out of the race, and seven Republican Senators cast their votes for Maddux, resulting in a 19-13 win (one Republican responded “Present and Not Voting”).

For two weeks, the inability of the members of a single party to work with each other was paraded across newspaper headlines throughout the state. The *Tennessean* described it as a “Black Page of History In [the] Works on Capitol Hill.”²⁶ Though the editors of that paper were referring to Governor Clement’s dastardly deeds in pressuring the situation, the headline summed up the state of affairs for the Democratic Party at the time nicely, as well. This debacle signaled the beginning of a tough time for Tennessee Democrats.

Buford Ellington: the Beginning of the End

Thus, Democratic candidates of the mid to late 1960s found themselves in a chaotic atmosphere. But there was more than just a period of political wandering in the desert taking place in Tennessee at this time. The war in Vietnam was gaining steam, and sons of Tennessee, just as those of the rest of the nation, were shedding their blood. The Civil Rights movement was coming to a head, and as the nation began to recover from the assassination of John Kennedy, two more assassins took the lives of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., the latter’s death occurring in Memphis. At the same time, Governor George Wallace was taking the torch of states’ rights advocacy and racism to the national stage, following in the footsteps of Strom Thurmond. All of this was coming on top of big problems for the Democratic Party in Tennessee: the organization of Crump was long gone, and the Kefauver committee had dissolved into the halls of justice. Albert Gore was running on political fumes, and the Clement/Ellington faction was continuing on the momentum established by its standard-bearers. The assertion that

²⁶ “Black Page of History In Works on Capitol Hill,” *The Nashville Tennessean*, 6 Jan. 1965, p. A-8.

Ellington was indeed a true “standard-bearer” for the Democratic Party, or any part of it, is subject to debate, however.

There is substantial evidence supporting the idea that Buford Ellington actively, though fairly quietly, promoted the restoration of the Republican Party to a level of power unheard of in Tennessee since Reconstruction. In his memoir, *Let the Glory Out: My South and its Politics*, Albert Gore, Sr. recounted the tale of Republicans’ voting *en masse* in the Democratic primary of 1966 for the weaker candidate, Governor Frank Clement, over the incumbent, liberal Ross Bass, who had been elected to fill Kefauver’s vacated seat. Clement was to face East Tennessee Republican congressman Howard Baker, Jr. in the general election. Ellington was in a heated primary race against Nashvillian John Jay Hooker, and decided to ally with the Republicans: “I was...told by a widely recognized East Tennessee business leader, Hugh McDade of Maryville, that he had arranged a meeting between [Baker and Ellington] at a mountain retreat owned by Alcoa and that [they] did in fact reach a working agreement to avoid hurting each other.”²⁷

It was in the 1966 race that Governor Ellington proclaimed that he was an “old fashioned segregationist.” When asked how race played into that campaign, since strong talk of segregation had passed, John Jay Hooker, Jr., Nashville attorney and Ellington’s primary opponent in 1966, interrupted and quickly made it clear that the former governor had in fact made race an explicit issue in that election year: “Ellington said he was an ‘old fashioned segregationist.’ How can you be more explicit?...And so [race] was there, and it was talked. Not really debated, but talked. You were either for them or against them.”²⁸ Hooker was unequivocally for the African-Americans, and had the assistance of Martin Luther King, Jr. in

²⁷ Albert Gore, Sr. *Let the Glory Out: My South and its Politics* (New York: Viking Press, 1972), pp. 194-196.

²⁸ John Jay Hooker, Jr. Personal interview. 1 Nov. 2007.

his effort.²⁹ When the returns came in for the 1966 primary, the racial divide was clear: in Nashville, Hooker received only 29% of the white vote, but garnered 89% of the black vote. Likewise, in Memphis, he got 37% of the white vote, and 80% of the black vote.³⁰ Exactly why there was an almost perfect tradeoff between white and black votes between the two cities for Hooker is unclear; one possibility was that as a Nashvillian, he knew the African-American community there well, and generally campaigned more heavily in Memphis, where he was not as well known.

Another interesting factional divide can be found when comparing the primaries and general elections of 1966 and 1970, specifically, the gubernatorial primary of 1966, the general U.S. Senate election of 1966, and the general gubernatorial election of 1970. The two elections of 1966 featured members of the conservative wing, Frank Clement in the Senate race and Buford Ellington in the gubernatorial race, and the 1966 primary and 1970 general elections both were contested by John Jay Hooker, Jr. Three counties statewide³¹ switched from supporting the Democrat, conservative Clement, in 1966 to the Republican, Winfield Dunn, in 1970. Each of these had supported Buford Ellington over Hooker in 1966. Likewise, five counties made the opposite switch, and three of those³² had supported Hooker in 1966. Both of these occurrences indicate a fleeing to the Republican Party by Democrats as a reaction against the candidacy of a representative of the opposing Democratic faction.

Beyond that, the general trend between the two elections was that most counties that had voted Democratic in 1966 voted more heavily Democratic in 1970, and counties that voted

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Numan V. Bartley and Hugh D. Graham. *Southern Elections: County and Precinct Data, 1950-1972* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 391-92.

³¹ Gibson, Hardeman (West TN), and Williamson (Middle TN)

³² Benton, Decatur, Haywood (West TN), Lawrence (Middle TN), and Polk (East TN); Polk and Haywood did not support Hooker, but were narrow in their partisan support in 1966 and 1970.

Republican in 1966 were less so, as the race was closer between the two candidates. However, thirteen counties bucked this trend, and eleven of them had supported Ellington in 1966³³; again, this indicates a strong reaction against Hooker's candidacy, causing those who had typically voted Democrat to switch parties.³⁴

In the 1970 elections, Governor Ellington continued to favor the Republicans. In the primary for the Senate seat, Ellington's press secretary and former news anchor Hudley Crockett ran against Gore in a bitter race. Customarily, the defeated candidate in a primary race endorses the victor, for the sake of party unity. If a candidate declines to endorse, it is usually seen as a sign of lingering animosity. Rarely does the defeated primary candidate endorse the nominee of the other party. But that is what Mr. Crockett did in the 1970 election, endorsing Republican candidate Bill Brock in the General Election. Governor Dunn also tells of how Ellington indirectly aided him in his campaign:

"I'm not sure that [Ellington's daughter Ann] worked on my campaign...but this I do know. When I heard of it, I was thrilled to death...I heard that Ann Ellington had a Dunn bumper sticker on her car. Now that really gave me a big charge. Another interesting thing is that one of Governor Ellington's cabinet members, his name was Claude Armour...endorsed me."

The former Memphis police and fire commissioner offered his resignation to Ellington, but the Democratic governor had no problem with a member of his cabinet endorsing a Republican.³⁵

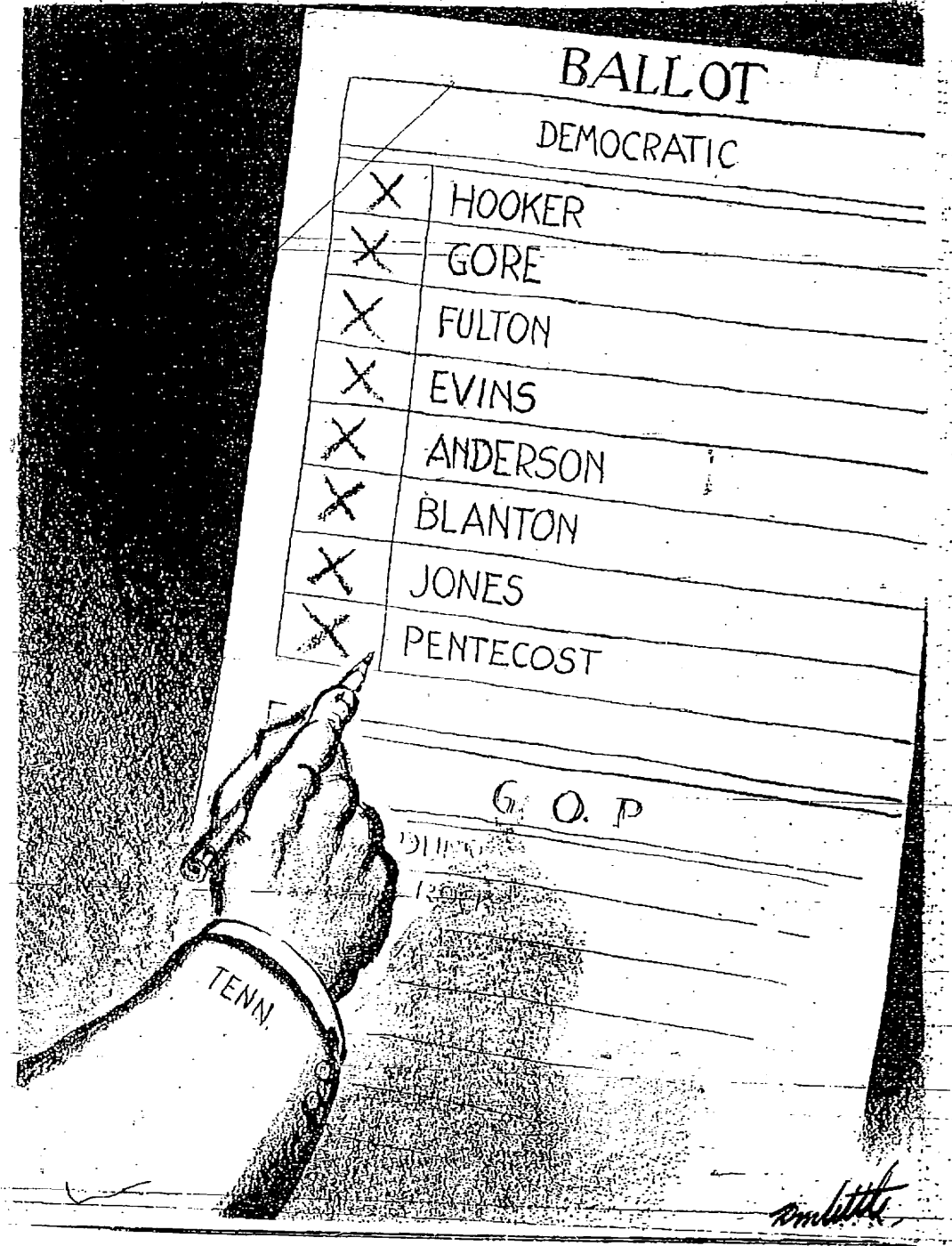
³³ Sequatchie (East TN); Cheatham, Clay, Davidson, Dickson (Middle TN); Chester, Crockett, Dyer, Fayette, Hardin, Madison, Shelby, Tipton (West TN); Chester and Shelby both supported Hooker in the 1966 primary, yet voted more heavily Republican in 1970, when Hooker was the Democratic nominee. Davidson and Shelby Counties' voting more heavily Republican can probably be explained, I think, by growth of the suburban population (see Chapter 3).

³⁴ All data in the previous two chapters came from Richard M. Scammon, *America Votes, Vols. 7&9* (Washington: Governmental Affairs Institute, 1968, 1972), p. 375-76 and 315-16, respectively; and Numan V. Bartley and Hugh D. Graham, *Southern Elections: County and Precinct Data, 1952-72* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), p. 225-27.

³⁵ Winfield Dunn interview.

Thus, with the 1970 election, one can see partisan fragmentation at its height, and can understand how it was so easy for the Republicans to step in. The Republicans had organized statewide in a manner which had never been seen in the state, as the Democratic Party had never suffered from enough competition to merit such organization. After the conflict had moved into the state capitol and Governor Ellington had helped to rend the party apart even further, the Republican Party of Tennessee found itself with an incredible and historic opportunity. However, the question remains: why did this occur? What set Tennessee apart from the other southern states in its political chaos, and how did that set Tennessee up to be the first chink in the Solid South's armor?

The People's Choices



Nov. 1, 1970: the *Tennessean's* partisan picks

CHAPTER THREE

Finding the Fount of Factional Fighting

Now that the story of the Tennessee Democrats' divide has been told, it must be explained. There could be a number of explanations, ranging from the mundane to the extraordinary, but in the end, it is clear that the cause is twofold. The underlying historical root is the longstanding Middle Tennessee-West Tennessee division, going back to the nineteenth century. Ideologically, West Tennessee Democrats were more conservative in nature, while the Middle Tennessee Democrats had a strong Populist/Progressive streak.¹ In the twentieth century, that division was exacerbated by the competition of the *Nashville Tennessean* and the *Nashville Banner* into a bitter rivalry which left the field open for the Republicans to step in.

Southern One-Party Systems

The first thing that must be done in order to explain why Tennessee's partisan splintering occurred as it did before the rest of the South is to show how the state's politics differed qualitatively from those of the other southern states at the time when significant change began in Tennessee in 1948. Fortunately, Key's *Southern Politics in State and Nation* was published in 1949, and approaches each state's political characteristics at that time on a chapter-by-chapter basis. Thus, I rely heavily on it to provide a brief overview of comparative state politics in the South at the midpoint of the twentieth century, and will provide analysis on how the differences resulted in an altered timeline of political change.

¹ Phillip Langsdon, *Tennessee: A Political History* (Franklin, Tenn.: Hillsboro Press, 2000).

Virginia's political system most resembled Tennessee's machine-driven situation. The organization of Senator Harry Flood Byrd, Sr. completely dominated Virginia politics, to the point that even local candidates had approved in order to obtain office. There is no sense of democracy in the way statewide officeholders are selected: "Once [the Byrd organization] puts its stamp of approval on a candidate, the courthouse machines accept him almost unanimously and he is virtually assured of the nomination."² The anti-organization faction was characterized by little to no consistent leadership, and occasionally found itself in alliance with the Republicans in the mountains.³ This differs from Tennessee's situation in two ways: first, it was the Crump wing that often allied with the Republicans, and second, the anti-Crump wing had consistent and strong leadership in the form of the *Tennessean*, Senator Kefauver, and Governor Browning. The weak opposition (both from within and without the Democratic Party) and the nearly dictatorial nature of the Byrd machine in Virginia both contributed greatly to the longevity of Democratic power in the state.

Alabama, Florida, and Arkansas represented the exact opposite of Tennessee and Virginia's stable machine politics. All three exhibited a strong tendency toward localism, the condition where "candidates for state office tend to poll overwhelming majorities in their home counties and to draw heavy support in adjacent counties."⁴ In the cases of Alabama and Arkansas, this often produced results which resembled a type of sectionalism, with the state divided among two or three candidates. In Florida, however, a state of near-anarchy existed; in gubernatorial elections between 1936 and 1948, for example, as many as fourteen candidates ran (with the nominee winning with a plurality of 15.7% in that case), and the largest share of votes

² V.O. Key, Jr., *Southern Politics in State and Nation, A New Edition* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977), 23.

³ *Ibid.*, 21, 27-34.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

won by a nominee was only 32.5%.⁵ In states like these where the Republican Party had virtually no presence, and there was no organization against which an opposition could be mounted, all the chaotic political goings-on naturally and easily took place within the context of the Democratic Party.

Georgia and Louisiana stood as examples of political systems oriented around the presence of a demagogue. In Georgia, the Talmadges, Eugene and Herman, stayed in power through the combination of their rural populist appeal and the dominance of the rural areas made possible by the county-unit vote system in the primaries.⁶ Likewise, in Louisiana the Kingfish, Huey Long, beat the New Orleans machine and established a thoroughly corrupt unitary state that maintained popular support through its incredible increase in public services. After Long's death, his brother Earl and son Russell ensured the continuation of the faction based on name recognition alone.⁷ While demagoguery rather predictably resulted in an opposition faction, the personal gravity of the Talmadges and the Longs made for a much more stable environment than that found with a machine like Crump's, which was based on the influence of a power broker upon other elites rather than the ability of a moving orator to stir the masses.

South Carolina and Mississippi, as the two southern states with the highest proportions of African-Americans, were the states where race became virtually the only campaign talking point. "While others shared their views, the politicians of South Carolina—and Mississippi—have put the white supremacy case most bitterly, most uncompromisingly, most vindictively."⁸ While localism and sectionalism were factors in both states, as in Alabama, Arkansas, and Florida, the

⁵ Ibid, 89.

⁶ Ibid, 106-129.

⁷ Ibid, 156-164.

⁸ Ibid, 130.

race question really became the deal-breaker for candidates in these two states.⁹ This unity of purpose among politicians made the dominance of a single party a rather simple issue; the later defection of Strom Thurmond in South Carolina plus his and George Wallace's candidacies for president were what really turned those two states away from the Democratic Party. In Tennessee, on the other hand, with race much less of a concern, division among the Democrats over economic and other issues made for a conservative Democratic audience receptive to the words of the Republicans.

The root of division in Tennessee politics derives, in large part, from its geographical diversity.¹⁰ Of course, the mountainous East Tennessee has been traditionally independent minded, going back to the colonial days, and Republican, going back to the Civil War.¹¹ But the divide between the other two of the "Three Great States of Tennessee," Middle and West Tennessee, goes back a long time, as well, according to Judge Merritt:

"There were some institutional reasons why I think there was a separation...One of them was the dominance of the Jacksonian Democratic tradition, Jackson being the patron saint of the Democratic Party in Middle Tennessee...a Populist...[West Tennessee] was a plantation economy, it was Bourbon Democrat...not based on any Populist notions of equality...They were Democrat because of Lincoln, the Freedmen's Bureau, because Republicans were pro-black."¹²

This analysis is confirmed in the characteristics of the politicians hailing from these respective areas. The Populist tradition remained strong in Middle Tennessee, while the conservatives were concentrated in the West.

⁹ Ibid, 131, 230.

¹⁰ Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, *The Transformation of Southern Politics: Social Change and Political Consequence since 1945* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), 286.

¹¹ Bill Jenkins. Personal interview. 28 October 2007.

¹² Gilbert S. Merritt. Personal interview. 31 October 2007.

A Tale of Two Sillimans, Plus Jimmy Stahlman

One of the things that truly set Tennessee apart on its own terms politically, and which played a large role in the intra-party strife was the competition between the two main Nashville newspapers, the *Nashville Tennessean* and the *Nashville Banner*. In Key's book, the *Tennessean* is one of only two newspapers throughout the South to have its own entry in the index; the other, the now-defunct *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, existed in the volume only to serve as a comparison to the much more influential periodical from the capital city. Being the primary news sources from the seat of Tennessee's government, it should not be surprising that the *Tennessean* and the *Banner* were foremost in the state for political coverage. However, there does not seem to be a parallel in any other state for the type of political activism and influence which could be found in these two papers.

The *Tennessean* has had a long history in Nashville, going back to 1818. It was founded in its current form in 1907 by Col. Luke Lea, and in 1937 came under the ownership of Silliman Evans. Under the guidance of Lea, Evans and his sons, Silliman, Jr. and Amon, the paper became known as a solidly Democratic newspaper. "Through the years, *The Tennessean* remained staunchly Democratic, becoming one of only four major newspapers in the nation to support Harry S. Truman in 1948."¹³ Beyond that, it became the voice of the progressive, Middle Tennessee wing of the Party, fighting against the poll tax and fighting for the breakup of machine politics. That seemed to come about alongside the emergence of Boss Crump's Memphis machine, which became the paper's greatest foe (along with the *Banner*). As John Seigenthaler, former editor and publisher of the *Tennessean*, related, "Silliman Evans [Sr.]...wrote a will in which he said to his sons, 'continue to fight the machine in Memphis and

¹³ "History of 'The Tennessean' stretches back to region's early settlement," *The Tennessean*, 25 November 2007.

all its vestiges,' and that was Crump."¹⁴ In the Democratic primaries, that meant that the Kefauver/Gore/Hooker/Bass Democrats could always count on the *Tennessean's* support over the Ellington/Clement/Crump Democrats.

The *Nashville Banner* was founded in 1890 by Major E.B. Stahlman, a Northern Republican. Not surprisingly, the *Banner* remained the voice of Republicanism in the mid-state for its entire existence until it was closed in 1998. Though it combined its printing operation and began sharing its offices with the *Tennessean* in 1937, it maintained editorial independence.¹⁵ The competition with the *Tennessean* was fierce and bitter, to the point of being ridiculous; according to Eddie Jones, press secretary to Governor Frank Clement and last editor of the *Banner*, Jimmy Stahlman, descendant of E.B. and publisher during the 1960s, refused to let the clock on the *Banner's* side of the sign at the offices of the two newspapers be set on Daylight Savings Time, so the clock read two different times, depending on the direction from which it was approached.¹⁶ Taking this extreme opposition to *The Tennessean* into account, it nearly goes without saying that in the absence of a competitive Republican Party, the *Banner* endorsed the Crump/Ellington/Clement candidates in every Democratic primary.

It is unclear, however, whether the endorsements of the West Tennessee Democrats were made because of the candidates' ideological sympathy with the editorial staff or if they were endorsed simply because the *Tennessean* endorsed the other faction. In the case of Governor Ellington, it seems that his status as a virtual Republican was a factor in his alliance with the *Banner*.¹⁷ In Clement's case, however, the latter reason motivated the *Banner's* editors,

¹⁴ John Seigenthaler. Personal interview. 30 May 2007.

¹⁵ "History of 'The Tennessean,'" *The Tennessean*, 25 November 2007.

¹⁶ Eddie Jones. Personal interview. 13 November 2007.

¹⁷ Riley C. Darnell. Personal interview. 25 September 2007; Merritt interview; Winfield C. Dunn. Personal interview. 2 October 2007; Gore, Albert, Sr. *Let the Glory Out: My South and Its Politics* (New York: The Viking Press, 1972), 194-196.

according to Judge Merritt, who worked on Ross Bass' successful primary race against Clement for the Senate in 1964: "Frank Clement was really a [liberal] Democrat in his philosophy. He had made his alliance with Stahlman...mainly because he couldn't get the support of the *Tennessean*...for reasons of personality."¹⁸

With a heavy and loyal readership, the *Banner* and the *Tennessean* were both able to play an important role in the election of Republicans to statewide office. Once the Republican Party became organized well enough to field serious candidates in the general elections, the *Banner*'s readers, who had presumably been inclined to support the conservative Democrats like Ellington and Clement, were presented with the choice of electing Republicans who were ideologically similar to the conservative Democrats and were supported by their newspaper of choice. The *Tennessean*, despite its reputation as a Democratic stalwart, also helped usher in the era of Tennessee Republicanism. In 1966, following Clement's defeat of Ross Bass in the Democratic primary for Senate, Amon Evans and the *Tennessean* chose to follow the word of Silliman, Sr. literally and endorsed Republican Howard Baker, Jr. in the general election. While primarily sticking with Democratic candidates, the *Tennessean* continued to support Baker throughout his career in the Senate.¹⁹

The story of Clement's adoption by the *Banner* is a characteristically muddled one. The *Tennessean*, after being purchased by Silliman Evans in the early 1930s, "made opposition to Boss Crump the touchstone of [its] newspaper policies...Anyone backed by Crump had the *Tennessean*'s opposition; Crump's enemies could count on *Tennessean* support, provided they had some hope of success."²⁰ When Gordon Browning first ran for governor back in the late

¹⁸ Gilbert Merritt interview.

¹⁹ John Seigenthaler interview; Gilbert Merritt interview.

²⁰ Lee Seifert Greene, *Lead Me On: Frank Goad Clement and Tennessee Politics* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), p. 55.

1930s, he was a Crump candidate, and was therefore duly opposed by the *Tennessean*. Ten years later, he had fallen out of grace with the ruler of Shelby County, and was unreservedly backed by the *Tennessean*, alongside the other anti-Crump statewide candidate, Kefauver. So by the time Frank Clement was ready to run for the office against Browning in 1952, the older, traditional Southern Democrat kept the support of the liberal newspaper and the school-integrating, death penalty-halting progressive Democrat got the support of the reactionary conservative-Democrat/Republican paper, as well as the support of the vengeful Crump. As illogical as this was, there was nothing to be done about it, as Clement's biographer pointed out:

“Nothing that Clement could do changed things—no matter how closely his policies followed what the *Tennessean* was assumed to stand for; the morning paper generally found means to put an unfavorable light on Clement and his fortunes. The unwary reader could be thoroughly puzzled by the differing versions of affairs served up by the two journals. Only when they unwillingly jibe can one be certain that the unrelenting pressure of fact has forced them into temporary agreement.”²¹

The incredibly strong personalities of the Silliman Evans, his sons, and James Stahlman would not suffer any divergence from their set ways, even if it meant some contradiction over the course of time.

Further evidence of the influence exerted by Silliman Evans, Jr., and Stahlman can be found in the events of the 1956 Democratic National Convention, already discussed previously in Chapter One. The *Tennessean* and Evans were among the strongest backers of Estes Kefauver in all his political pursuits, and the publisher of the Nashville morning paper accompanied the senator to Chicago for the convention. When it had become clear that Gore (another *Tennessean* choice, though not backed as enthusiastically as Kefauver or later, John Jay Hooker, Jr.) was out

²¹ Greene, p. 280.

of the Vice-Presidential race, Evans was not going to let the Tennessee delegation continue to back Gore, or switch its votes to Kennedy, at the cost of Kefauver's losing the race. Kefauver's biographer tells the story beautifully:

"Gore, though a teetotaler, sat in a small bar hard by the convention floor and watched on television as his support melted like butter...Gore was found at last by [A. Bradley] Eben [a supporter], sent on an urgent mission by Silliman Evans, Jr.,...and escorted [Evans] to Gore...Young Evans seized Gore by both lapels and snapped furiously, 'You son of a bitch, my father helped make you and I can help break you! If you don't get out of this race, you'll never get the *Tennessean's* support for anything again, not even dogcatcher. The *Tennessean* will beat you if it takes a million years!'"²²

Gore, creator of the Interstate Highway System, close friend of President Kennedy, and father of a Vice President of the United States, then quietly returned to the floor and endorsed Kefauver, securing him the nomination.

The other side of the state Party also caught a good deal of flak from its journalistic sponsor, James Stahlman. After Clement, leader of the Tennessee delegation, "allowed" the state's votes to go to Kefauver, he received a lengthy letter from the publisher of the *Banner*. While Stahlman communicated his feelings to Clement in a (relatively) much more formal and dignified manner than did the excited Evans to Gore, his tone makes clear the fact that he saw himself as a patron of the conservative wing of the Party:

Your subsequent stultifying performance under the guise of 'party unity' was disgusting and an affront to all who had relied upon your courage and your vaunted political 'savvy' and strength to maintain your position against the State's and South's worst renegade.

You have charted your own course. You have chosen new political associates. Such an

²² Charles L. Fontenay, *Estes Kefauver: A Biography* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1980), p. 274-275.

alliance is revolting and repulsive to The Banner. It cannot and will not acquiesce...My greatest disappointment is my loss of faith in a friend upon whose assurances and in whose background as a Tennessean and a Southerner I had reposed fullest confidence.²³

While this seems like a sincere expression of disappointment from an old friend (and probably was, to an extent), Stahlman's letter should also be read as a sort of veiled threat from a committed Republican to the Democrat he supported not out of ideological empathy, but out of necessity and political convenience.

When Stahlman was able to deal with Republicans who stood a good chance of winning, the gloves came off. When candidate Winfield Dunn met with the *Banner's* publisher for the first time before during the 1970 gubernatorial race, he was quite put back by the older man's diatribe: "He promptly launched into a monologue that must have subconsciously caused my eyebrows to begin to rise...Invective followed invective, character assassination, if there was character in the subject, unfolded before my eyes and ears, and language that might have been the pride of any old salty sailor flowed with a surprising degree of eloquence."²⁴ Stahlman continued with a description of the (vicious) strategies required to beat Hooker, leaving Dunn shocked and quite dumbfounded.

Clearly, the *Tennessean* and the *Banner* gained a degree of political influence and statewide respect which was not to be found in the other major news outlets of the state. This is almost a throwback to the times when newspaper editors were themselves active politicians, a condition that had occurred before in Tennessee.²⁵ That a newspaper publisher could grab a United States Senator by the lapels and force that man to do his will is a rather shocking check

²³ Letter from James G. Stahlman to Frank G. Clement, 24 Sep. 1956. Reprinted in Greene, p. 243.

²⁴ Winfield Dunn, *From A Standing Start: My Tennessee Political Odyssey* (Nashville: Magellan Press, 2007), p. 267.

²⁵ Luke Lea and Edward Ward Carmack, one-time editor of the *Nashville Democrat* and *Memphis Commercial* in the 19th century, both made their way to the U.S. Senate after their tenures at the newspapers.

on the reality of political workings at the time. Likewise, Stahlman's (only marginally) less direct machinations show how even if they were occasionally ignored, these men had an impact that spanned decades.

Competing Creeds: Kefauver vs. Kenneth McKellar in Congress

As important as the newspapers were to the division between the factions of the party, it must be remembered that the factions also split as a result of pure ideological disagreement. The finest example of this can be found in the early rift formed between then-Congressman Estes Kefauver and the venerable Senator Kenneth McKellar, Crump's most powerful lieutenant, over the Tennessee Valley Authority beginning in 1942. McKellar had been an early supporter of the TVA, and an early fan of Kefauver: "In 1940, McKellar had said of Kefauver that 'I believe the time will come when he will be one of the great leaders of the state.'"²⁶

However, McKellar was not satisfied with the degree of control he was able to exert over the new government corporation. He submitted an amendment onto the annual enabling legislation, ending the Authority's "revolving fund," and arranging instead that it be financed through the regular Congressional appropriations process. As the senior Democrat on the Senate Appropriations Committee behind Carter Glass (VA), who was absent due to ill health, McKellar would have a tremendous influence over the TVA if it were subject to his committee's actions. He also tried to insure that all TVA employees receiving a salary of more than \$3,800 a year be subject to Senate confirmation, thus increasing his patronage power.²⁷

On the other side of Capitol Hill, Kefauver, along with fellow Tennessee Congressmen J. Percy Priest and Albert Gore and other future Senate colleagues like John Sparkman of Alabama,

²⁶ Joseph Bruce Gorman, *Kefauver: A Political Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 8.

²⁷ Gorman, p. 8-11.

led the opposition to McKellar's plan. They stopped the passage of the amendment in 1942, though it was eventually passed in 1944.²⁸ By that time, the antipathy between Kefauver and McKellar was quite bitter. When they were together in the Tennessee delegation to the 1944 Democratic convention, Kefauver stood alone against most others from the state, supporting Henry Wallace and later Harry Truman for Vice President over favorite son candidate and Governor Prentice Cooper. In response to this, McKellar wrote a letter home to the Boss which resounds with the maturity inherent in man who had served in the Senate for twenty-eight years: "[The Tennessee] delegation was very harmonious except for alternate Kefauver. He was present at each meeting of the delegation and...objected to everything...[The convention] did not pay him a particle of attention...He is about as stupid as they make them."²⁹

Conservatism and Campaign Cash

As mentioned in Chapter One, there was a strange dichotomy in statewide elected offices, with the Governor's office (after Browning) occupied by the West Tennessee faction and the Senate seats held by members of the Middle Tennessee faction. The best potential explanation for this lies in the differing sources of campaign funds for the two offices. When asked about the donors to the Gore and Hooker campaigns in the 1970 race, Judge Merritt, who also served as finance chair for Hooker's campaign and later, finance chair for the Tennessee Democratic Party, said, "The people who wanted to give to the governor's race were people who wanted something

²⁸ Fontenay, p. 108.

²⁹ Letter from Kenneth D. McKellar to William H. Crump, quoted in Gorman, p. 13.

out of the governor...road contractors and all that kind of stuff...[Gore's] money was more pure. He was getting more out of state money, too."³⁰

The same formula could probably be applied to the other races of the era. Businessmen, who tend to vote Republican, gave to candidates who not only were more conservative, but who could help out their donors with contracts and other benefits once they were in office. On the other hand, conservative businessmen could get less benefit from giving to a conservative Senate candidate, as one vote out of ninety-eight or a hundred could not effect great change easily. A liberal Senate candidate who benefited from the endorsement of the most influential newspaper in the state, though, would have appealed to the national Democrats; liberal followers of congressional politics were undoubtedly eager for another vote to balance out the Southern Democrats, who were the strongest forces of regression in the Congress. As there were apparently few in-state donors who were not businessmen looking for a government contract, and few businessmen who cared to support Senate candidates, the equation balances out with conservative-wing governors and progressive-wing Senators in place.

With Tennessee's statewide offices split between the two factions of the state Democratic Party and the two major newspapers of the state vociferously backing different factions, the gap that in other states might have been glazed over with the coming of a new election and a new prominent politician's personal faction was made into a deep rift which had a highly detrimental effect upon the Democrats' strength in Tennessee. Lacking any central Party organization, the internecine strife successfully turned the Tennessee Democratic Party into a false storefront with not a single plank holding it up. In the end, it is this which had the greatest effect on the Democratic Party's loss of power in Tennessee during the 1960s.

³⁰ Gilbert Merritt interview.

Something New on Capitol Hill



Tennessean, Jan. 8, 1969: J.P. Kimbrell—Big Man on Campus

CHAPTER FOUR

On the Electoral Behavior of Non-Elite Political Actors, OR It's the Voters, Stupid

While this thesis focuses primarily on the influence of political elites upon the development of the two-party system in Tennessee, it cannot be forgotten that the smallest yet most important political unit in any democratic system is the individual voter. Southern voting behavior is a topic that has been well-covered by historians and political scientists alike, and Tennessee voters have often been slightly ahead of the curve by initiating the trends described by students of Southern politics. For example, Tennessee has backed the winning candidate in every presidential contest since 1908, Democrat or Republican, with the exception of 1960, when it backed the Republican Richard Nixon, unlike most other Southern states, that either backed Kennedy or the Independent ticket of Senators Harry Flood Byrd of Virginia and Strom Thurmond of South Carolina.

The early move to Republicanism (or at least bipartisanship) in presidential voting in Tennessee presaged the rise of Republicanism in voting for lower-level offices. Although this same process took place across the South, it should not be assumed that Tennessee was simply part of a region-wide trend; as mentioned several times previously, Tennessee's transformation into a two-party system resembled that of other Southern states, but took place earlier than elsewhere. A brief overview of the causes of rising Republican voting across the South is in order, but there were other events leading to the rise of two-party voting in the state that merit discussion, as well.

The United States Supreme Court decision in the case of *Baker v. Carr* is a fairly standard topic in any high school civics course. This case, which gave the courts authority to rule in cases of legislative apportionment, had an especially large impact upon Tennessee, as it was a Shelby County Democrat, Charles Baker, who sued Joe Carr, Tennessee's Secretary of State, as he was the constitutional officer responsible for the administration of elections. Followed soon by *Reynolds v. Sims*, which set forth the "one man, one vote" rule, Tennessee's legislative apportionment was soon transformed to more fairly represent urban voters, who provided a hefty proportion of the Republican votes to be found outside of East Tennessee.

The ultimate effect of these decisions and the ensuing redistricting was that the Republicans made huge gains in the state General Assembly, particularly in the House of Representatives. By 1969, there was a Republican Speaker of the House, Bill Jenkins of Rogersville, for the first time since Reconstruction. As the bottom rung of political representation at the state level, the arrival of heavy Republican voting at this level is significant in the identification of a true two-party system. While the Republican majority in the House (at least for organizational purposes) only lasted through one General Assembly (the 86th) and has not returned since then, the significant Republican presence in the state House of Representatives has been a constant reminder of the permanent place of Republicanism in the modern state.

Demographic Change, Partisan Change

The old order was built on an unchanging, unitary electorate, as befitted its nature as a government based on unchanging beliefs and centered on a single issue. In 1950, only eight percent of whites residing in the South were born outside of the region; in Tennessee, the percentage of non-Southerners was four, and even by 1980, only one county, Montgomery, had

over 20% non-native residency.¹ Compared with other states in the Peripheral South like Texas, Arkansas, Virginia, and Florida, Tennessee was and remains extremely homogeneous. Thus, as Black and Black point out, “such limited northernization cannot explain much of the political change that has occurred.”²

One demographic factor which did have a significant impact on Tennessee’s electorate is the growth of the urban population. From 1920 to 1980, Tennessee went from having 0% of its electorate in a large metropolitan area,³ tied with eight other Southern states in last place, to having 63% of its population in an urban area, second only to Florida as the most urbanized state in the South.⁴ As urban voters’ interests are highly divergent from those of rural voters (and therefore highly divergent from the dominant political classes in the traditional South), alternate political ideologies are likely to spring up in the cities: “To the extent that blacks, liberal Democrats, and Republicans are represented in state legislatures, they are most likely to come from districts located within large metropolitan areas.”⁵

Finally, the growth of the middle class spelled doom for the traditional Democratic majority. According to polls conducted by the University of Michigan between 1972 and 1984, 56% of Southern, middle-class whites believed that economic well-being was the responsibility of the individual rather than the government, a classic Republican tenet.⁶ Likewise, by the late 1960s, just over 50% of white Southerners were labeled by Earl and Merle Black as middle class,

¹ Merle Black and Earl Black, *Politics and Society in the South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 17-18. Montgomery County is home to Fort Campbell Army Base, where the 101st Airborne Division is located; this explains its large non-Southern element.

² *Ibid.*, 17.

³ Defined by Black & Black as “counties that are part of an SMSA with a total population of at least 250,000,” *Politics and Society*, 35. An SMSA is a Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area, a large city and surrounding counties as defined by the US Census Bureau.

⁴ Black and Black, 42.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.

based on economic census data⁷; according to the 1970 census, about 54% of Tennessee households were middle class, and 44% of those lived in “urbanized areas,” meaning either the inner cities or the fringes around the cities.⁸

The assumption that the demographic and socioeconomic change in Tennessee was matched with a corresponding rise in Republican voting is borne out by electoral data. Figure One shows the correlation between increasing numbers of urban residents and increased Republican voting. The “Average Republican percentage” employed is the average of Republican performance in all contested statewide races in a given year. Even when incumbency gave Democratic candidates a substantial advantage, Republicans steadily increased their performance in the state.⁹

Clearly, the growth of the urban/suburban middle class had a strong effect on the growth of the Republican Party in the state outside of East Tennessee. However, while in statewide and national races these new Republican voters could effectively make their presence known, they were unable to make a difference very often in legislative and congressional races, due to unfair districting.

Baker v. Carr and Reapportionment

At the beginning of the 1960s, the Tennessee General Assembly was in an outdated and archaic condition. The state Constitution required that each *county* receive an appropriate number of representatives in the House, and that districts (such as they were) could not cross

⁷ Ibid., 53.

⁸ United States Bureau of the Census. *1970 Census of Population, Volume 1: Characteristics of the Population, part 44, Tennessee*, p. 204.

⁹ Ibid., p. 9; Tennessee Department of State, *Tennessee Blue Book, 1949/50-1973/74*. The spike in the Republican average in 1956 is due to the fact that the only statewide race that year was the presidential race, in which Dwight D. Eisenhower carried the state; likewise, the dip in 1968 is due to George Wallace’s strong third-party candidacy, where in Tennessee he came in second, behind Republican Richard Nixon and ahead of Democrat Hubert Humphrey.

county lines. If a county did not have enough residents to merit its own representative, a “floterial district” would be created, encompassing two or more counties. The Constitution also required that reapportionment of the seats take place every ten years, after the census.¹⁰

However, the legislature, dominated by rural representatives, simply declined to reapportion the districts after 1901. Needless to say, by 1962 the districts had become even more unfairly drawn than they might have been in 1901¹¹:

“For example, Moore County, Tennessee’s smallest county with a population of about 4,000...had one representative...while Shelby County...had eight legislators for about 500,000 people. The ratio of 1 to 62,500 in Shelby County, compared to a ratio of 1 to 4,000 in Moore County, resulted in a vote for legislative seats being worth 15 times more in Moore County than in Shelby County.”¹²

This situation thoroughly robbed the urban areas of their constitutionally mandated portion of political power in the state.

Beyond that, the fact that it was counties, not districts, that received representatives meant that if a county had more than one representative (like Shelby County’s eight), voters in that county would vote for a party’s slate of representatives, rather than for individual candidates. The practical result of this condition was that in a majority-Democratic county like Davidson or Shelby, Republicans could not get elected; if the legislative vote were 49.9% Republican and 50.1% Democrat, the entirety of the county’s legislative delegation would be Democratic. This winner-takes-all system made two-party competition impossible, and Republicans knew it: when Winfield Dunn was approached to run on the Shelby Republican ticket in 1962, he was concerned about neglecting his dental practice in his frequent travels to Nashville, but his friends

¹⁰ Tennessee Constitution, Article II, §§ 4,5,6

¹¹ The plaintiff in *Baker v. Carr*, Charles Baker, claimed that even in 1901, the lines were “arbitrarily and capriciously” drawn; Robert B. McKay, *Reapportionment: The Law and Politics of Equal Representation* (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1965), 71.

¹² Richard L. Wilson, “Tennessee” in Leroy Hardy, Alan Heslop, and Stuart Anderson, eds., *Reapportionment Politics: The History of Redistricting in the 50 States* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1981), 302.

reassured him, “You don’t have to worry about that! You run at large from the county, and the county’s Democrat, [so] there’s no way a Republican can win.”¹³ The point of contesting the election was to help organize the party and increase its visibility, not to actually try to send representatives to the state capitol.

Remaining faithful to the dictums of Machiavelli, the enthroned rural bloc in the legislature resisted any move to make changes in apportionment which would threaten their power. However, the class action suit filed by plaintiffs from Memphis, Nashville, Knoxville, and Chattanooga, known as *Baker v. Carr*, forced the General Assembly to change its ways, once the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs in 1962 after two exhaustive rounds of arguments and the recusal of Justice Charles Evans Whittaker.¹⁴ The Court ruled in this case that the judicial branch had jurisdiction over reapportionment issues, overturning the ruling in *Colegrove v. Green* in 1946 which had labeled reapportionment as a political issue and therefore non-justiciable.¹⁵ Finally, the case of *Reynolds v. Sims* in 1964 set forth the “one man, one vote” rule. This required that voters could only elect a single representative, making the Tennessee practice of electing party slates to the legislature unconstitutional.¹⁶ This all resulted in the need for a special session of the legislature to redraw its district lines for the first time since 1901.

In the 82nd General Assembly, elected in 1960 while *Baker v. Carr* was in the pipeline, the counties containing the four major cities in Tennessee (Shelby-Memphis, Davidson-Nashville, Knox-Knoxville, Hamilton-Chattanooga) had twenty representatives in the state House. Of those twenty, two were Republicans, both from Knoxville.¹⁷ After a series of special

¹³ Winfield C. Dunn. Personal interview. 2 Oct. 2007.

¹⁴ Richard C. Cortner, *The Apportionment Cases* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1970), 56, 133-159.

¹⁵ *Baker v. Carr*, 369 U.S. 186 (1962); *Colegrove v. Green*, 328 U.S. 549 (1946)

¹⁶ *Reynolds v. Sims*, 377 U.S. 533 (1964)

¹⁷ Tennessee General Assembly, House Archives

<http://www.legislature.state.tn.us/house/Archives/82GA/Members/82members.html>, accessed 13 Feb. 2008. From

sessions beginning in 1962 and ending in 1965, the legislature completed a reapportionment plan that was approved by the voters of the state in 1966.¹⁸ As Congressman Bill Jenkins put it, “for the first time in years, we had meaningful gains, and elected Republicans in Shelby County districts, in Davidson County districts, and in Hamilton County districts.”¹⁹ As a result of the reapportionment and the creation of districts within the counties, the combined delegations from Davidson, Hamilton, Knox, and Shelby Counties in the 85th General Assembly numbered forty-two, eight votes short of a majority. The partisan breakdown of those delegates was twenty-five Democrats and seventeen Republicans, a net gain of fifteen seats for the Republicans since 1960.²⁰ That was the beginning of two-party competition in the state House, as demonstrated in Figure Two (end of chapter).

The 86th General Assembly and the Republican Majority

After the general election on November 5, 1968, a nearly unprecedented event occurred in Tennessee politics. It was not the election of a Republican governor, senator, congressman, or president. It was the election of forty-nine Republicans to the state House of Representatives, one vote short of a constitutional majority. Had the Democrats won the other fifty seats, there would have been a tight partisan divide when it came to voting, but the all-important committee chairmen, the Speaker, the clerks and everybody else would have been selected by the Democrats. But the Democrats also won only forty-nine seats. There was one Independent.

this point on, I will only be referring to events in the state House of Representatives. This is for two reasons: first, the most drastic changes took place in this time period took place in the House. Secondly, and more practically, the state Senate’s online archives date back to the ancient date of 2003, while the House archives date to 1889.

¹⁸ Lee Seifert Greene, *Lead Me On: Frank Goad Clement and Tennessee Politics* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), 331.

¹⁹ Bill Jenkins. Personal interview. 28 Oct. 2007.

²⁰ Tennessee General Assembly, House Archives

<<http://www.legislature.state.tn.us/house/Archives/85GA/Members/85Members.html>>

J.P. Kimbrell, a native of Lawrence County, in southern Middle Tennessee, was elected to his first and only term in the House of Representatives in the 1968 elections at the age of 73. Unlike every other member of the House of Representatives, his entry in the House archives fails to give a birth date, marital status, occupation, religious preference, or membership in any clubs or organizations. In the television age, he was by no means a typical politician, physically: “He’s five feet, eight inches tall, weighs 220 pounds, has a grayish-red beard about seven or eight inches long, and considers questions about whether he will shave or not ‘personal and not funny.’” According to the *Tennessean*, he was a farmer by profession. He had been twice elected general sessions judge in Lawrence County, but ruled ineligible for the bench because of local-interest legislation passed by the General Assembly requiring that the Lawrence County general sessions judge be a lawyer. Apparently, the only issue on which he based his campaign was a resolution to repeal that legislation.²¹ This seemingly dour, mysterious one-term legislator had the control of the state House in his hands.

While it is true that there had not been a Republican Speaker of the House since Reconstruction, this kind of even split was even further removed from precedent. *Tennessean* political columnist Joe Hatcher looked back with trepidation upon the 1841 speakership battle in the Senate between the Democrats and the Whigs. His reason for twitchy nerves? He feared that the 86th General Assembly, with a Democrat-led Senate and a Republican-led House, would be as divided as the 24th, where the Whig Senate and Democratic House disagreed so badly that “the result was largely two years of wasted time and money in the state...For two years, the state went without a United States senator because the two houses were never able to meet in joint convention to fill the vacancies.”²² Of course, Hatcher, a columnist at the Democratic-leaning

²¹ Nat Caldwell, “House Independent Cagey on Vote Plan,” *The Nashville Tennessean* 6 Nov. 1968, A-1, A-17.

²² Joe Hatcher, “Party Cleavage in Wind Today Resembles 1841,” *The Nashville Tennessean* 7 Jan. 1969, A-1, A-2.

Tennessean since at least the late forties, was probably over-reacting at his party's loss of power. However, as this situation had never existed in modern times, a degree of apprehension is understandable.

At some point during this time, an outside influence came in to aid the Republicans. A family friend of Bill Jenkins, Republican representative of Rogersville and candidate for Speaker, had grown up in West Point, Tennessee, home of Kimbrell, and had gone to school with the man nicknamed "Santa Claus" by his peers in the legislature. He travelled down to Kimbrell's home and asked him to cast his vote for Jenkins, unbeknownst to the candidate. That such a chance occurrence should have a dramatic effect upon the history of the state and the lives of all Tennesseans is remarkable; as Jenkins put it, "there's a personal connection in every story...[and] that was probably one of the things that changed the House that year."²³

In the end, Kimbrell did cast his vote for the Republican Bill Jenkins to be elected Speaker of the House, along with all the Republicans and an African-American Democrat from Knoxville, Robert Booker, who cast his vote for Jenkins because he wanted more power for East Tennessee and because he was promised a place on the local government committee, as well as a federal patronage job from the Nixon administration if he should decide to leave the House.²⁴ With the installation of Bill Jenkins in the Speaker's chair, true two-party competition had arrived at the lowest level of state government in Tennessee. Though the Republicans lost their organizational majority by the 87th General Assembly, and have not retrieved it since, they have remained highly competitive, and the House continued to be closely divided for the next several decades.

²³ Bill Jenkins interview.

²⁴ Larry Daughtrey and John Haile, "Dealing GOP Wins in House," *The Nashville Tennessean*, 8 Jan 1969, A-1, A-2

The demographic and socioeconomic changes which affected Tennessee and the whole South had a dramatic impact on the political fortunes of the Democratic and Republican parties throughout the region. The influx of voters to the cities and their increasingly unorthodox (relative to the traditional South) political views made for changes in Tennessee's presidential and statewide voting patterns, but it was not until *Baker v. Carr* and the other reapportionment cases that the forced rearrangement of the state's legislative districts allowed for genuine two-party competition at every level of government. By 1969, the Republicans had captured one U.S. Senate seat and the state House of Representatives; the following year, they were able to capitalize upon their previous successes and fully usher in the two-party era in Tennessee politics.

Figure 1: Republican Growth and Urban Growth

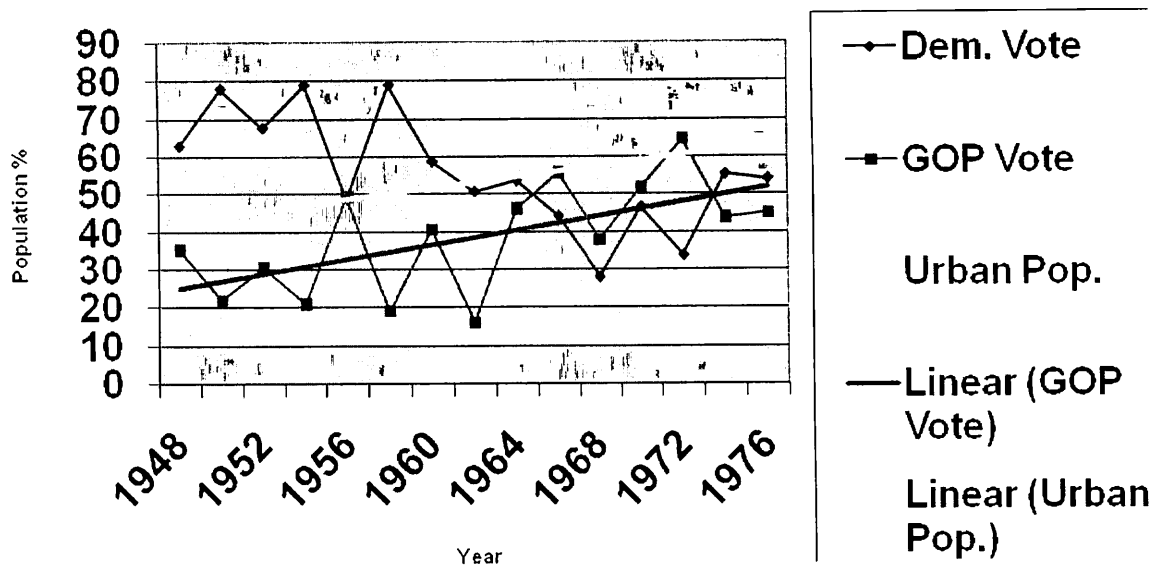
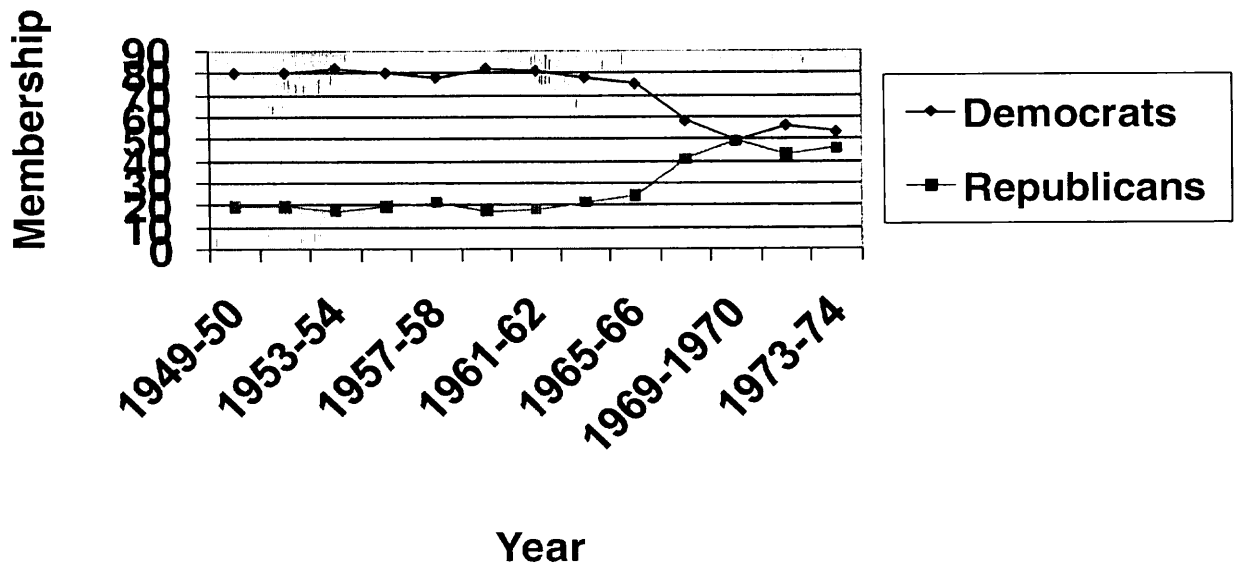
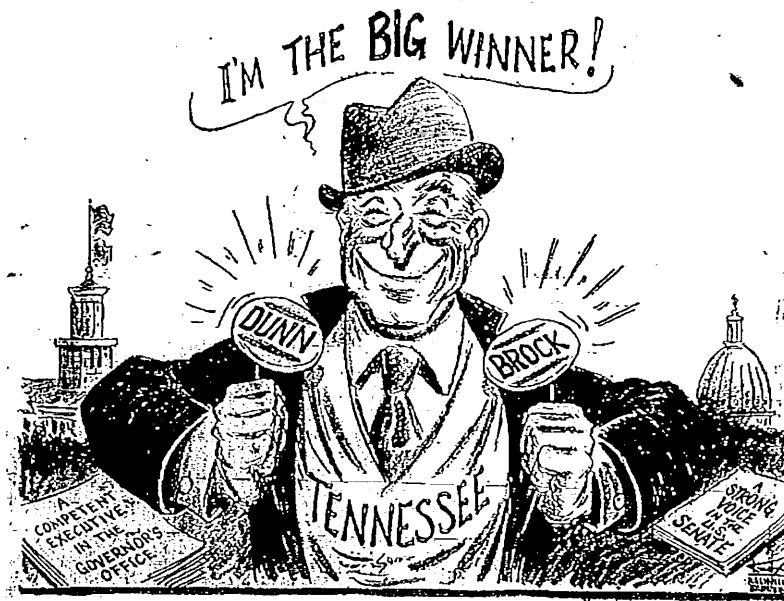


Figure 2: House Caucus Membership, 1949-74





Banner, Nov. 4, 1970



Tennessean, Oct. 22, 1970

Diverging views of Republican candidates

CHAPTER FIVE

The Elections of 1970: The Tipping Point

The 1970 elections were the moment for which over two decades of change had been building up in Tennessee. The forces that began to work in the 1948 elections with the disintegration of the Crump machine came to maturity in the year that witnessed the breakup of the Beatles, the U.S. invasion of Cambodia, and the killing of four students at Kent State. In the elections of this year in Tennessee, there were a variety of factors which came to play in the Democrats' loss of every statewide elected office (keep in mind, in Tennessee there are only three of these, the governor and two Senators). These can be summed up in four categories: primary challenges from the right wing of the Party, individual problems with both Democratic candidates, Albert Gore, Sr. and John Jay Hooker, and the decision not to form a coordinated campaign.

*"I would rather not be a target, but if I must, I prefer to be No. 1"*¹

By the time of the 1970 elections, Albert Gore, Sr. was in a weak position, politically. Beginning two years earlier, Gore had found a worthy nemesis in the form of the Nixon administration, particularly Vice President Spiro Agnew. Gore described Agnew as "our greatest disaster next to Vietnam," and when Agnew announced that he would campaign in Tennessee

¹ Albert Gore, Sr., quoted in Kyle Longley, *Senator Albert Gore, Sr.: Tennessee Maverick* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), p.229.

against Gore, the senator mockingly announced on the Senate floor, “The Vice President has done me the honor of promising to come to Tennessee and campaign against me next year. I am grateful for this promised service and touched. There is nothing the voters of Tennessee appreciate more than having outsiders come in and instruct them on how to vote.”² The inevitable result of this was that the Nixon White House and the Republican establishment came to see the 1970 Senate race in Tennessee as one of the most important races in the nation. The need to rid the Senate of one of Nixon’s greatest critics on nearly every issue and replace him with someone who would toe the Nixon line was an overwhelming priority, and the funding allocated to Bill Brock’s bid from the national Republicans reflected that priority; with the help of fundraiser Jackie Gleason (television star of the early sitcom *The Honeymooners*), upwards of \$200,000 came to Brock from outside the state. In addition to Brock’s own personal fortune as a candymaker and the fundraising difficulties mentioned in Chapter Two, Gore was at a serious financial disadvantage in the race. Even when the issue of fundraising was mentioned, Gore stubbornly backed away by citing his success in the past. In response to a letter from Hawaiian Senator Daniel K. Inouye, then chairman of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, asking about Gore’s participation in a DC fundraiser, Gore wrote, “Frankly, fundraising is something about which I know practically nothing. I have never really raised any substantial campaign funds, and have never had any.”³ Beyond that, he had a minimal staff, a fact which has already been noted.

For a man who came into political maturity in the age of courthouse squares and raucous, country-music-and-Bible filled stump speeches, the transition to the modern political era, which experienced its inauguration in Tennessee in the 1970 race, was not an easy one for Gore. The

² Longley, p. 223.

³ Letter from Albert Gore, Sr. to Daniel K. Inouye, March 23, 1970. Albert Gore Senate Collection, Middle Tennessee State University, series 10, folder 75.

time had passed when he could have personally reached most of the state's population through appearances at the larger county seats in Tennessee. The huge suburban growth and dwindling (or more likely, the proportionate lack of growth) of the rural areas of the state made a modern media apparatus a necessary component of the campaign. Gore could not afford the media blitz put up by his opponent, but he hired a Washington documentarian, Charles Guggenheim, to make a series of advertisements which featured Gore back home in Carthage, Tennessee with his son and with old friends and constituents. John Seigenthaler, then editor of the *Tennessean*, recalled the impact of the commercials: "One had Albert Gore playing checkers...on a public square, and an old guy walks up to him...and says, 'Albert!' And Senator Gore looks up at him and says, 'Hello, Charlie,' and he said, 'Albert, you remember in [some election year], I told you after you helped me out [with veteran's benefits or something], I'd be here when you need me.' And [Gore] says, 'Yes.' 'Well, I'm here, Albert.'...those commercials were dynamite, positive."⁴ However, this limited media apparatus was insufficient to stand up to the weight of Brock's campaign structure.

As mentioned earlier in Chapter One, an unusual thing occurred in the Democratic primary for the Senate: the three-term incumbent and senior Senator Albert Gore was given a relatively strong opposition by Hudley Crockett, press secretary to Governor Buford Ellington. While nobody involved could have believed before the race that Crockett could defeat or even draw a significant number of votes away from Gore, Ellington's man could and did act as a stalking horse, bringing up harmful issues that could be used by the Republican campaign of Bill Brock to hurt Gore in the general election, though his finish only six points behind the senior Senator served as a wake-up call for the Gore campaign. In fact, John Seigenthaler sees this as having more of an impact than any general trend toward Republicanism: "I think Brock's

⁴ John Seigenthaler. Personal interviews. 30 May 2007, 9 July 2007.

election had nothing to do with Republicanism, it had to do with the fact that Buford Ellington ran his press secretary against Gore to undermine him...then Hudley Crockett, the Democratic loser to the Democratic nominee, endorsed Bill Brock.”⁵ This idea was apparently supported by Pauline Gore, Albert’s wife, as well.⁶ While it seems somewhat unlikely, based on facts such as Richard Nixon’s and Spiro Agnew’s campaigning in Tennessee as well as the previous election of Howard Baker, that a shift toward Republicanism had “nothing” to do with Brock’s victory, certainly Crockett’s endorsement made Gore’s race a great deal more difficult.

Gore’s increasingly powerful image as a DC insider rather than a Tennessean, combined with his stance against the Vietnam War, are what probably hurt him personally the most in the end. The Brock campaign went to great lengths to paint Gore as a man who had distanced himself from the people of his state; there were full-page advertisements taken in the *Banner* and the *Tennessean*, proclaiming that “ALBERT GORE HAS TAKEN A POSITION AGAINST SCHOOL PRAYER THREE TIMES,”⁷ and that “BILL BROCK BELIEVES IN THE THINGS WE BELIEVE IN,”⁸ among other things. According to several interviewees and other sources, the talk about Albert Gore not “believing in the things we believe in” was essentially a coded appeal to racism; as David Halberstam put it, “It is not the old, sweaty, gallus-snapping racism that was once used against Claude Pepper [progressive Senator from Florida]: rather it is cool and modern.”⁹ Gore had once successfully appealed to the masses as a populist, playing the fiddle at his campaign stops in courthouse squares; by 1970, however, he had, to many people, become “too big for his britches.”¹⁰ Likewise, despite attempts to show that he supported the

⁵ Seigenthaler interview. 30 May 2007.

⁶ Seigenthaler interview. 9 July 2007.

⁷ Advertisement for Senate candidate Bill Brock, *The Nashville Tennessean*, 21 October 1970.

⁸ Advertisement for Senate candidate Bill Brock, *The Nashville Tennessean*, 2 November 1970.

⁹ David Halberstam. “The End of a Populist.” *Harper’s*, January 1971, p. 39; John Seigenthaler interview; Gilbert S. Merritt, Jr. Personal interview. 31 October 2007. Riley S. Darnell. Personal interview. 25 September 2007.

¹⁰ Gilbert Merritt interview. Eddie Jones. Personal interview. 13 November 2007.

troops without supporting the war, Gore's stance on Vietnam, even with his son Al, Jr., appearing with him in uniform, created a nearly insurmountable stumbling block, and he did not have the personal skill to explain himself as Kefauver had in an earlier decade.¹¹

In some ways, Gore hurt himself in that he failed to refute the "DC insider" label as he ought to have. After Senator Edward Kennedy had a car accident on Chappaquiddick Island, MA in which a young woman died, Gore expressed confidence in him and voted for him to become Assistant Majority Leader in the Senate. In a letter to constituent Mrs. John R. Sanders on April 11, 1969, Gore wrote, "I thought since the leadership of the Democratic Party in the Country is now focused in the United States Senate that the Party should have leaders who were truly national rather than sectional in record and viewpoint."¹² However, such a sentiment did not resonate well with many people in the state. An anonymous Memphian wrote the Senator, "Glad to see you put another tack in your political coffin, by voting for another of the Kennedy clan. The public is sick and tired of the whole family and will be glad to vote against any of his [*sic*] supporters, as soon as I [*sic*] can."¹³ While there were some expressions of support from citizens of Tennessee, they were outnumbered heavily by letters written in opposition to his views, particularly on the Kennedy issue.

The issue of race in the 1970 Senate campaign was noted by more than just Halberstam, an acknowledged Gore sympathizer. When asked about Halberstam's accusation of implicit racism on the part of the Brock campaign, Judge Harry Wellford, Winfield Dunn's campaign chairman, had this to say:

¹¹ John Seigenthaler interview; Gilbert Merritt interview; Eddie Jones interview; Richard Fulton. Personal interview. 18 October 2007; Halberstam, 35-40.

¹² Letter, Albert Gore, Sr. to Mrs. John R. Sanders, 11 Apr. 1969. Albert Gore Senate Collection, Middle Tennessee State University, series 10, folder 68.

¹³ Letter to Albert Gore, Sr., 6 Jan. 1969. Albert Gore Senate Collection, Middle Tennessee State University, series 10, folder 68.

I wouldn't disagree strongly with Halberstam's assessment...My own personal view is that I do not think that Bill Brock was a racist. But I think Bill was supported in many areas of the state by the hard right, the more fundamental right-wing Republicans, who were very concerned about what was changing and happening in the land, and desegregation, and integration, and all of the beginnings of the racial revolution that came about.¹⁴

While Wellford and the Dunn campaign did not take advantage of the growing racial sentiments in the state, the Brock campaign did, regardless of their candidate's own personal beliefs. Using these tactics against Gore, who had already caught criticism for voting against conservative Southern jurists Clement Haynsworth and G. Harold Carswell, when Nixon appointed them to the Supreme Court,¹⁵ Brock was able to stir up the sentiment that Gore was not a true Southerner.

U.S. Senator Jim Sasser, campaign manager for Gore in 1970, confirmed that a cultural-conservative backlash hurt Gore. He said that in 1970, there "really was a sense that those who objected to the war in Vietnam were unpatriotic, different from mainstream conservative Democrats."¹⁶ Issues like the Vietnam War and civil rights helped to divide the rank-and-file Democrats, and in the campaign, there were organizations like Democrats for Bill Brock founded as a demonstration of discontent within the party. Additionally, voting blacks in Shelby County had become a majority and were electing officials from within their community, and that caused a reactionary run to the Republican Party.¹⁷ And in response to all these attacks, Gore did nothing. One of the two biggest mistakes made in the race, according to Sasser, was "not

¹⁴ Harry Wellford. Personal interview. 22 Oct. 2007

¹⁵ Haynsworth had been accused of ruling in cases in which he had a financial interest, and Carswell had been described by members of the Nixon administration as "mediocre" and "a boob." Longley, p. 221, 225.

¹⁶ Jim Sasser. Personal interview. 9 Apr. 2008.

¹⁷ Ibid.

realizing the effectiveness of negative campaigning, ignoring it.”¹⁸ By trying to stand above the fray, Gore did more damage to himself than would have occurred if he had simply stopped to refute Brock’s accusations that he was unpatriotic or even un-Christian.

In the end, Gore lost the race by 46,000 votes, 52.1% for Brock to 47.9% for Gore. East Tennessee, traditionally Republican, backed Brock with three-fifths of its votes, while the Populist-Democratic Middle Tennessee gave the Senator 62% of its votes. Thus, it was West Tennessee which provided the deciding margin. In the final analysis, it can be asserted that it was the influence of a Memphis Republican, Winfield Dunn, running for governor which sealed the election for Brock, giving him 55% of the Shelby County vote and the election. Interestingly, though turnout increased statewide from the 1966 to 1970 Senate elections, it increased the least, 18.7%, in East Tennessee, and the most, 44.1%, in Middle Tennessee. Additionally, the 1970 elections seemed to have a polarizing effect in Middle and West Tennessee, but a moderating effect in East Tennessee: the Republican plurality in West Tennessee increased from 2.5% of the total vote in 1966 to 10.3% four years later, while in Middle Tennessee, the Democratic plurality increased from 13.6% to 22.3% in 1970. In East Tennessee, however, the Republican plurality actually decreased, from 36.2% in 1966 to 21.4% in 1970.¹⁹ This might have been a consequence of Bill Brock’s status as a New Guard Republican, who appealed to West Tennesseans (and repulsed Middle Tennesseans) more than the moderate, Old-Guard Baker.

Geopolitical Strategy Meets Fried Chicken

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Scammon, Richard M., ed. *America Votes 8 & 9: A Handbook of Contemporary American Election Statistics* (Washington: Governmental Affairs Institute, 1968, 1972), pp. 317-318, 375-376.

When Winfield Dunn decided to run for Governor, he possessed a fair amount of political experience, but almost no statewide recognition. Beginning in the early 1960s, he and other Republicans in Shelby County had worked at organizing the Party from the grassroots level, and eventually succeeded in electing Dunn's friend (and dental patient) Dan Kuykendall to Congress. While Dunn was an enthusiastic activist for the Republican Party, he had almost no large base on which to build a statewide race. However, as he made his decision to run, he devised a basis and justification for his campaign. This was called the "East-West" strategy:

"Congressman Bill Brock was an East Tennessean, Senator Howard Baker was an East Tennessean, and three of our four Republican U.S. representatives were East Tennesseans. That represented a potentially large Republican vote in the general election of 1970. Since Dan Kuykendall was elected to Congress from heavily Democrat West Tennessee, it was clear to me that West Tennesseans weren't necessarily opposed to voting Republican if the right conditions prevailed...I was beginning to believe that if Bill Brock were to have a chance to carry the state, the best possibility would exist if there was a strong Republican candidate running for governor who was a West Tennessean."²⁰

Of the five contenders in the 1970 Republican primary, Dunn was the only West Tennessean. There were three East Tennesseans: Hubert Patty, a former gubernatorial candidate in 1962, but otherwise unremarkable, Claude Robertson, a popular Knoxville Republican, and Bill Jenkins, from Hawkins County in Upper East Tennessee, the Speaker of the state House of Representatives (see Chapter 3). There was one Middle Tennessean, Maxey Jarman, CEO of the shoe manufacturer/retailer Genesco. He also subscribed to a similar theory of using one of the traditionally Democratic sections of the state to boost the East Tennessee base, and beyond that,

²⁰ Winfield Dunn, *From A Standing Start: My Tennessee Political Odyssey* (Nashville: Magellan Press, 2007), p. 76.

had a large campaign war chest from which to draw. However, the thought of being able to shake up some Republican votes in Albert Gore's part of the state held dubious promise. As shown above, the East-West strategy of Dunn certainly paid off for the Republicans.

John Jay Hooker's greatest hindrance in his candidacy for governor was the financial trouble caused by his business dealings. Son of a prominent Nashville lawyer (and a talented lawyer himself), Hooker had started a chain of restaurants, Minnie Pearl's Chicken (named after the Grand Ole Opry star) which was intended to be "a serious competitor to KFC."²¹ However, he and other investors lost their money when the business failed. This business failure was an issue which was quite enthusiastically embraced by the *Banner*, as Hooker's opponent Winfield Dunn recalls: "My opponent, John Hooker, was having substantial business difficulties, and he had an arch-enemy, who was the editor of the *Nashville Banner*, Mr. Stahlman. There was a huge amount of negativism that Mr. Stahlman was responsible for publishing daily, because he had a pathological dislike for Mr. Hooker. And in the middle part of the state, at least, I think that played a substantial role in the campaign. I'd refer to him as the 'Chicken Man' occasionally."²²

Beyond his financial difficulties, which resulted in the campaign's bankruptcy,²³ Hooker was an unabashed liberal, which undoubtedly played poorly in a state which had gone overwhelmingly for Richard Nixon in 1968. "I had been a big friend of Bobby [Kennedy]'s, Martin Luther [King] was a friend of mine...As bad as I wanted to be governor, I had rather have stood up for civil rights at the right moment, have been against that damn war at the right moment, than [have] been the governor."²⁴ Being confronted by Jimmy Stahlman's *Banner*,

²¹ John Jay Hooker, Jr. Personal interview. 1 November 2007.

²² Winfield Dunn. Personal interview. 2 October 2007.

²³ Gilbert Merritt interview.

²⁴ John Jay Hooker interview.

which was “strong right-wing, more right-wing than the Lincoln Republican Party,”²⁵ it is no surprise that the two men found themselves as such bitter enemies. As discussed in Chapter Two, having a popular newspaper so bitterly decry the Democratic candidate and having a viable Republican candidate to endorse, readers of the *Banner* in Middle Tennessee, combined with the traditional East Tennessee Republicans and a new base of support for the Memphian Dunn in West Tennessee, gave the Republican Party the edge it needed to take the governor’s office.

Randy Sanders, in his book *Mighty Peculiar Elections: The New South Gubernatorial Campaigns of 1970 and the Changing Politics of Race*, covered four races in Southern states from that year and did not include Tennessee. His reason for doing so was that “the Tennessee campaign had little to do with racial politics or partisan change.”²⁶ While his decision not to cover Tennessee was understandable, given that he was focusing on moderate Democrats who won their races, his reasoning was flawed. He failed to take into account the impact of the Senate race, which had a fair degree of racial overtones, as well as Hooker’s own status as a liberal. In addition, he completely discounted the impact of nearly a decade of Republican organization statewide; in truth, both the Senate and gubernatorial elections of 1970 deeply reflect this organization and the partisan change that resulted from it.

Condemning the Coordinated Campaign: a Calamitous Catastrophe

The final mistake that doomed the campaigns of Gore and Hooker was the decision against combining the campaigns. At one point in the campaign, Hooker was perceived as a strong candidate who stood the better chance of victory in his race than Gore did in his. By the end of the race, the tables had turned, and Gore was running strongly, nearly catching up with

²⁵ Gilbert Merritt interview.

²⁶ Randy Sanders, *Mighty Peculiar Elections: The New South Gubernatorial Campaigns of 1970 and the Changing Politics of Race* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), p. 4.

Brock, while Hooker's campaign had failed. Soon after the August primaries, the proposition was made by representatives of the AFL-CIO that the two campaigns should combine, becoming a single fundraising entity, maintaining a coordinated schedule, and employing a unified strategy.²⁷ The benefits of such an action are obvious; much more energy could be spent by both candidates and campaigns on vote-winning, baby-kissing and door-knocking with a single staff managing the quiet work of courting donors, managing a budget, and dealing with the press. However, after the campaigns met and discussed the idea of combining, they ultimately decided not to do so.

Every interviewee and autobiographer consulted who was involved in the decision not to combine the campaigns agrees that a fatal error occurred for both campaigns. What makes these testimonies interesting, however, is the fact that none of the sources agree on who was for and who was against the idea while it was being discussed. Judge Merritt reports: "They had several meetings to discuss the Gore invitation [not the AFL-CIO?] to join the campaigns. Amon [Evans] and therefore Seigenthaler, who was working for him, were against it...Hooker, in my memory, was up in the air about it. I was very much in favor of joining the campaigns...Amon didn't like Gore, and Gore didn't really like Amon...I knew this from Pauline."²⁸ Gore, in his memoirs, claimed that he was very much in favor of combining, but that Hooker *and his campaign* were all against it, with the exception of Merritt. Hooker, on the other hand, claimed to have been in favor of the combination, but recalled that the *Gore* people were against it.²⁹ Mr. Seigenthaler said nothing of his or Amon Evans' opinion, but agreed that Merritt was in favor of combining, while the rest of Hooker's staff was against it for the most part. He also added that

²⁷ John Seigenthaler interview.

²⁸ Judge Merritt interview.

²⁹ John Jay Hooker interview.

Oliver Quayle, the pollster for both campaigns, advocated strongly for combination.³⁰ Finally, Senator Sasser reported that it was generally the Hooker campaign which was against coordination, but that toward the end of the race, they had warmed up to the idea quite a bit.³¹ These reports constitute is an interesting and amusing puzzle, and are important; conceivably, the individuals who ruled against combination are the individuals responsible for the loss of the elections. Perhaps further interviews will shed light on the truth.

Regardless of whose decision it was, the decision against combining the campaigns, along with Gore's and Hooker's individual weaknesses, were sufficient to allow the strong Republican candidates, Bill Brock and Winfield Dunn, to succeed in the elections of 1970. This election was the beginning of a truly competitive two-party system in Tennessee, the first Southern state in which this was the case. While Democratic victories in this election may have merely forestalled the inevitable, this early defeat, the product of a few campaign mistakes laid on top of serious underlying weaknesses in the Democratic Party, brought about the first break-up in the Solid South. Even though the Democrats later recovered from their losses (by 1987, the Governor, Ned McWherter, and both U.S. Senators, Jim Sasser and Al Gore, Jr., were all Democrats), the 1970 elections were significant as the first full loss of statewide offices by the Democrats.

³⁰ John Seigenthaler interview.

³¹ Jim Sasser interview.

Conclusion

The 1970 elections represented a low point for the Tennessee Democratic Party. The factional division which had split the Party into two camps since the 1940s, combined with the loss of strong leadership for either faction by the late 1960s, cleared the way for a resurgent, enthusiastic, and well-organized Republican Party to enter the fray on a statewide basis and resulted in the first true two-party political system in the South since the antebellum days of Democrats and Whigs. The defeat of two liberal candidates was hailed by some as the opening salvo of the battle in which the Republicans would take over the South from the Democrats, be they conservative or liberal.

Such was not the case. The Nixon administration's egregious errors came to light after the 1972 election, and the Watergate scandal put a black mark on the Republican Party, especially for officials like Bill Brock, who had tied their campaigns to their wonderful relationship with the White House. By 1974, Nixon and Gore's bane, Agnew, had resigned, and Democrat Ray Blanton defeated the up-and-coming Republican Lamar Alexander for the Governor's office. Two years later, Gore got his revenge upon those who had forced him out of the Senate.

The first great source of pleasure for Albert Gore in the 1976 elections was the election of his son, Al Jr., to Congress in the 6th Tennessee district. Al Gore had not always been inclined to become a political animal; John Seigenthaler recalled that after the younger Gore had returned from Vietnam, "he came to work for me [at the *Tennessean*], and said, 'I don't want to cover politics, it's unsavory'; he was disillusioned at the politics that had defeated his father. I never thought he'd run for office; I thought he'd wind up being a television journalist because he

looked like Clark Kent.”¹ However, young Gore entered the Democratic primary for the Congressional seat and won it, faced no serious competition in the primary, and began a long career in politics.

The same year, Gore’s former campaign manager, Jim Sasser, took on Bill Brock for the seat which he had taken from Gore. Sasser had risen to prominence in the state Democratic Party after the 1970 elections, and secured his place by becoming the chairman of the state Party’s Executive Committee in 1973. Federal Circuit Judge Gilbert Merritt, who served as the “lawyer, counsel, finance chairman, treasurer, whatever” for the Committee, emphasized that the Party’s previous chairman was getting on up in years, and that all the Party had left was its own committee and the state legislature (the Republican command of the House of Representatives only lasted one term).² According to Sasser, the Party had “no office, no structure, no money, and \$50,000 in debt.”³ Sasser became chairman and modernized the Party, making it leaner, meaner, and more fit for competition against another legitimate political party at the state level. He raised money and went to every county in the state, organizing Democratic committees, and the Tennessee Democrats managed to elect a slate of candidates to the state Supreme Court. This started a string of successes, including the election of the first black congressman from Tennessee, Harold Ford of Memphis, a new Governor, Ray Blanton,⁴ and in 1976, Sasser’s own election to the United States Senate.

¹ John Seigenthaler. Personal interview. 30 May 2007.

² Gilbert Merritt. Personal interview. 31 Oct. 2007.

³ Jim Sasser. Personal interview. 9 Apr. 2007.

⁴ It must be acknowledged that Governor Blanton was a patently corrupt governor, unpopular while in office and in jail soon after he was prematurely removed from office. Following Lamar Alexander’s election in 1978, Speaker of the House Ned McWherter and Lieutenant Governor John Wilder had Alexander sworn in late at night a few days before his scheduled inauguration in order to prevent Blanton from continuing to issue pardons to criminals who had paid the governor for the favor. Alexander secured the state capitol with the state Highway Patrol, and business resumed for the state.

Sasser was a pure populist, and criticized Brock's elitism at every turn: "Traveling the state in a Winnebago, he reached out to farmers and workers, asking: 'How can a millionaire know the plight of the poor, the uneducated, the jobless, the sick?'"⁵ He referred to Brock as the "'rich guy from Lookout Mountain,' which he was."⁶ Beyond that, he criticized the fact that Brock had managed to pay only \$1,500 or \$2000 of income taxes on his substantial yearly earnings, which resulted in the creation of pins saying "I Paid More Taxes than Brock."⁷ Unlike the wealthy Brock, who "enormously" outspent him, Sasser ran a shoestring campaign, with no polls and no advertisements in East Tennessee. Likewise, Merritt and the *Tennessean* uncovered a conflict-of-interest case involving the renting of some of Brock's properties to federal agencies.⁸ Despite an embarrassing and troubling episode a couple of weeks before the election when Governor Blanton called the race a referendum on his governorship, Sasser defeated Brock in 1976 by 78,000 votes, and began a lengthy Senate career. Of course, he was helped by the national candidacy of Jimmy Carter, about whom he said he would "Not only [ride] his coattails, I'm gonna get in the coat with him."⁹ The victory of Gore's friend Jimmy Carter over Gerald Ford both nationwide and in Tennessee put the cherry on top of the Democratic Party's resurgence in Tennessee.

Thus, the off-balance pendulum of partisan politics in Tennessee arrived back in the middle, after a long, long swing toward the Democrats (neither left nor right could accurately be applied in this metaphor) and a much briefer motion in favor of the Republicans. The division of the Democratic Party in Tennessee, exacerbated by journalistic jockeying and ideological

⁵ Kyle Longley, *Albert Gore, Sr.: Tennessee Maverick* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), p. 250.

⁶ Sasser interview.

⁷ *Ibid.*; Merritt interview. This strategy was repeated, with less success, in the 2006 Senate race, where there appeared on the bumpers of some Harold Ford Jr. supporters' cars stickers which read, "I Paid More Taxes than Bob Corker."

⁸ Merritt interview; Longley, p. 250.

⁹ Sasser interview.

incompatibility, made the state the right place at the right time for the first domino-fall of the breakup of the Solid Democratic South. To some, this was a tragedy. To others, it was a great event.

Starting with the defeat of the candidates sponsored by Boss Crump in 1948 by Gordon Browning and Estes Kefauver, a rift opened up in the Democratic Party of Tennessee, which continued under the leadership of Kefauver, Albert Gore, Sr., and later, John Jay Hooker, Jr. on the progressive side with the blessing of the *Nashville Tennessean*, and on the conservative side was led by Governors Frank Clement and Buford Ellington and the *Nashville Banner*. This conflict found expression in the halls of Congress, in the workings and functions of the national Democratic Party, in the Tennessee General Assembly, and of course, on the campaign trail among the state's voters. The intra-party strife found its fires stoked actively by the state's two leading newspapers, the *Tennessean* and the *Banner*, as well as by change in the demographics of the state. Finally, in the 1970 elections, a well-organized and insurgent Republican Party capitalized on the weaknesses of the Democrats and took complete control over Tennessee's statewide elected offices.

The question of whether or not this occurrence was a positive one is fraught with ambiguity. As a partisan Democrat, I cannot help but wish deep-down that the Democrats had remained in power. At the same time, the reason for the Democrats' weakness is an unambiguously good thing: the break-up of the conservative, race-baiting Bourbons' monopoly on power, replaced by a competition between the conservatives' remnants and a progressive, forward-looking Democratic faction, meant that the Democrats of Tennessee moved into the modern era where racism was left behind and the old Populism remained. Likewise, the presence of a true two-party system not only made the Democrats stronger and more unified, but

more importantly, it also gave the citizens of Tennessee a true choice between two equally valid (though often widely divergent) political philosophies and the policy choices that resulted from those philosophies. And in the end, it is likely that Tennessee, regardless of which party it tends to support, will continue to be its own entity, incapable of being lumped in with the more stereotypical Southern states, but equally incapable of being thought of as anything but a Southern state. Asked about the political future of Tennessee, State Senator Douglas Henry, a 28-year veteran of the General Assembly's upper house, reflected very eloquently on the subject:

“Tennessee has played a much larger part in national affairs than our numbers would dictate. And I think that's because the people that settled our state were more passionate in their beliefs and acted on their beliefs more than the average American...To the extent that we can remember that Tennesseans have always been people of passion and conviction, we'll continue to do well.”¹⁰

¹⁰ Douglas Henry. Personal interview. 9 July 2007.

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