

*Introduction:*

*The Citadel Symposium on Southern Politics*

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This special edition contains a collection of four papers presented in March 2012 at the Eighteenth Citadel Symposium on Southern Politics. The Citadel has biennially hosted what has become the premier conference dedicated to the study of the politics of the American South. Since its inception in 1978, the Symposium has attracted well over 400 scholars who have presented research devoted to a better understanding of the politics of the region. The Symposium has led directly to the publication of ten books focused on various aspects of southern politics. Indirectly, a number of other books were influenced by research originally presented at the Symposium. The number of peer-reviewed articles that were initially presented at the Symposium are too numerous to cite here.

Since the first Symposium, Southern politics has changed considerably. The South has grown enormously in both population and wealth. The South gained considerably in congressional reapportionment in the 2010 cycle. Texas led the way gaining four seats in the House with Florida gaining two seats. Georgia and South Carolina both gained one seat each due to population increases. Only Louisiana lost representation when it lost one seat due largely to population decreases in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. No other region of the nation gained so much in reapportionment in 2010.

The region has seen a partisan realignment from a Democratic stronghold at both national and state levels to an increasingly Republican region. After the 2010 elections, the Republican Party has become dominant at all levels. In 2012, Democrats hold only two governorships: Arkansas and North Carolina. The Republicans currently control all state legislatures with the exception of the Arkansas legislature and the Virginia Senate. At the congressional level, southern Republicans are dominant in U.S. House and Senate delegations. While the Republicans do not have regional hegemony to the degree that the Democrats did in the early-mid 20th century, in some areas of these individual states Republican strength does, in fact, approach those levels of dominance.

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*The American Review of Politics*, Vol. 34, Fall, 2013: 159-162

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In addition to the partisan changes, the region has dramatically changed in the area of race relations. When the Symposium first began, it was barely a decade removed from the profound changes in race relations in the South led first by the Civil Rights Movement and eventually federal intervention. Today, the South has become a much more racially diverse area that can no longer be understood solely through the lens of black and white. Current research has already begun to focus on the growing Hispanic populations in the region and how that will affect politics. This is an area that will undoubtedly continue to expand.

Over the years, scholars who have presented research at the Symposium have focused on a wide range of topics. Previous panels have focused upon race and culture, government institutions, state government, public policy, party politics, partisan realignment, as well as discussions on how the South as a region is changing with each passing year. One of the constant topics of discussion is whether southern distinctiveness is disappearing, or at the very least less pronounced.

As the South changes and continues to evolve, so the Symposium will as well. While we have many of the “old regulars” who have attended the Symposium since the early days of the event, one of the endearing qualities of the Symposium is that it provides a venue for younger scholars to present research at the conference. In some cases, these younger scholars, many of whom initially present research as graduate students, challenge many long-held assumptions about the region’s politics. In the future, we anticipate that trend continuing. The South is changing and with it her politics. To appropriate the title of John Egerton’s 1974 book, *The Americanization of Dixie: The Southernization of America*, we anticipate future symposia will focus on many of these same themes as the South seems to be becoming slightly less distinct than the rest of the nation.

On five previous occasions, *The American Review of Politics* has provided an opportunity to publish the best research presented at The Symposium. While there were a number of excellent papers presented at the 2012 meeting, four papers rose to the top. As we sat down to consider papers for inclusion in this special edition, we did not set out with a particular theme in mind. As readers will note, the topics of the research tend to revolve around partisan realignment and southern distinctiveness. Implicit in each of them is how the region is undergoing continual change. While the research topics certainly differ, this theme of change is quite appropriate given the discussions that took place at the 2010 Symposium.

At each Symposium, an invited keynote speaker who has made significant contributions in the subfield addresses the participants. This year’s keynote speaker was Charles Prysby of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Dr. Prysby’s talk appears here as an article, “The South: Still a

Meaningful Political Region?,” co-written with Benjamin Riesser. Analyzing electoral, ideological, and public policy patterns, Prysby and Riesser find evidence that the South remains a politically distinctive region compared to the rest of the nation, but the authors also find indications that the South is less politically cohesive within the region compared to earlier decades. While the South is considerably more conservative than the rest of the nation, the co-authors also argue that studying the Northeast as a region is especially appropriate as well since the Northeast has become considerably more liberal over the last four decades as the South has become even more conservative.

Jonathan Knuckey’s paper titled, “Dixie Backlash? Anti-Southern Affect and Party Support Outside the South,” offers an intriguing examination regarding whether or not the Republicans growing dominance in the South is harming its electoral success outside the region. This is an emerging area of research given the fact that the GOP has become so dominant in the region only in the last decade. The South was vital to the election of George W. Bush to the presidency in 2000 and 2004. Given how Republican the region is though, are there any adverse effects for the party outside the South? Using data from the American National Elections Studies, Knuckey attempts to provide some insights into this question. In 2008, Knuckey finds some evidence of a “northern problem” for the Republican Party. The NES data suggests that nonsoutherners, who harbored negative feelings towards southerners, may have been more likely to vote for President Obama. Interestingly, negative feelings towards the South influenced presidential vote choice among all partisan and ideological ranges. While the data indicates that nonsoutherners’ negative feelings towards southerners have dissipated over time, at least in 2008 it appears to have had some impact on voting behavior. Though the 2010 midterms saw the Republicans make notable gains in nonsouthern states, Knuckey raises the question of whether or not the GOP’s potential northern problem might affect current and future presidential nominees in battleground states. Time, and further research, will likely produce answers to that question.

Alan Abramowitz’s “From Strom to Barack: Race, Ideology, and the Transformation of the Southern Party System” takes a long-term perspective to determine some of the factors at play in the regional realignment of the South. Using a combination of NES data and exit polls from the 2008 presidential election, Abramowitz finds that the racial polarization of southern voting over the last four decades is largely a result of the mass exodus of white moderates and conservatives from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party. In the early 21st century, the Democratic Party in the South is dependent upon the nonwhite vote (both black and Hispanic) in the region as well as the small number of white liberals. This has put the Democratic Party

at an increasing disadvantage within the region. However, Dr. Abramowitz finds evidence that the ideological differences once present among Democratic voters in the South and non-South has have largely disappeared in recent decades due to the ideological realignment in the region. Also, there is some evidence that ideology is playing a larger role than racial attitudes in helping to explain the racially polarized voting that is present in the region.

Chad Kinsella's examination of the 2008 presidential election in the South rounds out this special edition in an article titled "The Political Geography of the South." Using geographic information system (GIS) technology, Kinsella explores the voting trends at the county-level in the eleven state South. Kinsella points out the fact that despite population growth and an increased number of electoral votes in the South as a whole, Republicans are increasingly dependent on the South for winning the White House, and 2008 illustrates that it is possible for Democrats to ignore the South and still win the presidency. While Barack Obama carried three southern states, Florida, North Carolina, and Virginia, he actually performed more poorly in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Tennessee. While survey data is extremely valuable in helping to determine voting behavior and electoral trends, Kinsella argues for the importance of a contextual analysis provided by GIS analysis. Dr. Kinsella finds evidence that race still plays a very important role in understanding southern politics.

We feel these articles help to expand our knowledge in the field of southern politics. While much is changing about the South, it still retains some of its political distinctiveness as these four scholars have demonstrated in their research. As one studies the South, its complexity and nuances become ever more present. We hope that the readers will find some illumination from these papers. Also, we would like to issue a cordial invitation to attend the next Symposium on Southern Politics scheduled for March 6-7, 2014.