

THE
DEMOCRATIC
EVOLUTION

FROM SLAVERY TO EQUALITY
1828-2024

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Evolution may be defined as any net directional change or any cumulative change in the characteristics of organisms or populations over many generations—in other words, descent with modification.

JOHN ENDLER, *NATURAL SELECTION IN THE WILD* (1986)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A NOTE ON THE COVER	
DEDICATION	
PREFACE	
SYNOPSIS	8
PART 1: PARTY PRINCIPLES AND PARTY PLATFORMS	11
1 Democratic Principles, Platforms, and Planks	12
2 Finding Planks in Party Platforms	20
PART 2: DEMOCRATIC POLITICS AND FORTUNES	31
3 1792-1828: The Democratic Party's Origin	35
4 1828-1860: Embracing Slavery	38
5 1864-1896: After Slavery and Before Segregation	45
6 1900-1928: Legislating Segregation	41
7 1932-1948: Tolerating Segregation	58
8 1948: The Year Democrats Crossed the Rubicon	64
9 1952-2024: Pursuing Equality	68
PART 3: THE CHALLENGE OF FEDERAL GOVERNMENT	75
10 The Constitution and Federalism	76
11 Democrats' Federalism Eras	88
PART 4: REVIEWING DEMOCRATIC PLANKS	94
12 Freedom and Order Planks	95
13 Equality Planks	105
14 Public Goods Planks	114
15 Democratic v. Republican Planks	124
PART 5: COMPARING PARTY EVOLUTIONS	132
16 Party Evolutions and Evolution Theories	133
17 Evolving from Federal to National	148
18 Centralism v. Decentralism in 2024	154
EPILOGUE	163
The National Authority Imperative	164
APPENDICIES	
A Chronological List of Platform Studies	169
B The "Federal" v. "National" Muddle	172
C Codes for 2,722 Republican Party Planks	176
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	
BIBLIOGRAPHY	

A Note on the Cover

In 2000, American television networks abruptly reversed the two parties' historic colors, turning Republicans red and Democrats blue. This obscure fact relates to the parties' evolutions. In politics across time and across the world, "blue" has been associated with ruling governments and "red" with the ruled rabble. Aristocrats were "blue bloods," and "royal blue" resonates better across the world than "royal red." "The Colors of Ideology," by Casiraghi, Curini, and Cusumano, studied more than 300 parties in 35 democracies. It found "a strong relationship . . . between ideology and the use of certain color hues: left-wing party logos mainly display hues at the red end of the color spectrum, while blue hues prevail among right-wing parties."

That color pallet also fit American history. Blue was the Republican color in 1860. The Union Army fought in blue uniforms against Confederate forces in gray. Afterward, union soldiers enforcing reconstruction were called "the blues." The speaker at an 1888 Republican rally in Chicago praised the weather "as clear as the record of the Republican party" and the glorious blue sky, which was "True Republican blue at that."

In contrast, red symbolized the 1917 Russian Revolution, and red was linked with communism and socialism. The "Red Scare" filled American media. After World War II, Republican Senator Joe McCarthy led a second "Red Scare." In response, the Cincinnati Reds baseball team's nationalistic owner officially changed its name to Redlegs in 1953. The team did not reclaim its original name until 1961. No Republican wanted to be colored red in the twentieth century.

That history of hues led many political scientists to color Republican wins blue and Democratic wins red on election maps. Created decades ago, the *Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections* website still plots election results since 1789 in blue for Republicans and in red for Democrats. What caused the color reversal?

During the disputed 2000 election between Republican George W. Bush and Democrat Al Gore, television honchos ignored political history (or were ignorant of it) and reversed the parties' colors. TV networks blithely portrayed Bush states in red and Gore states in blue, startling knowledgeable observers. Jodi Enda wrote in the *Smithsonian Magazine*: "The 2000 election dragged on until December, until the Supreme Court declared Bush the victor [by 527 votes]. For weeks, the maps were ubiquitous. Perhaps that's why the 2000 colors stuck." This couplet captures the anomalous state of political colors in American politics today:

Leftists are red, rightists are blue; Bush versus Gore, mixed up the two.

Perhaps TV executives did not mix-up party politics but had read all the party platforms—as I did—and were simply confirming that Democrats and Republicans had flipped their political principles by the twenty-first century. This book on the Democratic evolution, and my earlier one on the Republican evolution, provides data on more than 6,000 platform planks from both parties for readers to decide for themselves.

PREFACE

Books about party politics typically interpret facts and events from a partisan perspective. They often select data that support their arguments and opinions. Authors frequently succumb to that tendency. I am not immune to political bias. One way to combat bias is to examine all the evidence. This book about the evolution of the Democratic Party's principles examines all 3,392 planks culled from all 45 Democratic platforms since its first official platform in 1840.

Reading nineteenth century Democratic Party platforms convinced me that I would not have voted for Democratic candidates then, nor during the first quarter of the twentieth century. Democrats had adopted planks that were both racist and opposed to national authority. Even in the second quarter of the twentieth century, they ignored racial segregation throughout the South, the party's stronghold. By cataloging and analyzing the party's platform planks over 175 years, *The Democratic Evolution* documents how the party of slavery morphed into the party of social equality.

My earlier book, *The Republican Evolution: From Governing Party to Antigovernment Party, 1860-2020*, examined 2,722 planks from 41 GOP platforms since 1856. Scholars of all political persuasion agree that the Democratic and Republican parties of today are far different from the way they were at their origins, flipping the positions they held since the Civil War concerning social policies and states' rights. My conclusions are not novel, but they are far more explicit, detailed, and backed by better evidence.

Although this book is about the Democratic Party, I also draw on my database of Republican platform planks to compare the evolutions of the two parties in light of contrasting theories of evolution. Charles Darwin's theory of biological evolution applies somewhat to the Democratic Party; Herbert Spencer's theory of social evolution fits better with changes in the Republican Party over the last half-century. By reviewing the breadth of evidence, readers should gain a better understanding of the evolution of party politics in America.

Two key political values—Equality and Freedom—figure prominently in each party's evolution. Democrats increasingly used government to enforce social equality. In 1964, Democratic President Lyndon sought “not just equality as a right and a theory but equality as a fact and equality as a result.” Democrats subsequently legislated to combat economic inequality and promote racial and gender equality. In 2016, their party platform proposed “to study reparations”—compensation for past actions—to overcome the lasting “economic effects” of slavery. Democrats' legislation for gender equality expanded beyond women's rights. The party's 2020 platform promised “that all transgender and non-binary people can procure official government identification documents that accurately reflect their gender identity.” In 2022, Democratic lawmakers sought to increase gender-neutral bathrooms on Capitol Hill.

Republicans, in contrast, grew more interested in freedom—not “freedom now” as advocated by Blacks in the 1960s—but freedom from government regulations as advocated by Barry Goldwater. When accepting the 1964 Republican presidential nomination, Goldwater said “And this party, with its every action, every word, every breath, and every heartbeat, has but a single resolve, and that is freedom—freedom made orderly for this nation by our constitutional government; freedom under a government limited by laws of nature and of nature's God.” In 2015, Republicans in the U.S House of Representatives formed the House Freedom Caucus to support “limited government.” In 2023, Republican Senators introduced legislation permitting persons entitled to carry concealed guns in one state to carry them elsewhere, regardless of other states' laws.

Both words—Equality and Freedom—have positive valence in the English language and in American politics. They “ring true” in political discourse, inviting demands for more equality, or for more freedom. However—as explained in this book and as demonstrated in Democratic and Republican platform planks—policies that promote equality and those that promote freedom are typically incompatible. Moreover, since neither Equality nor Freedom is an absolute governmental value, neither ought to be maximized. But given that those words ring true in political speech, extremists in both parties use them in singing siren songs of destructive politics.

According to Greek mythology, sirens were beautiful half-women, half-bird creatures who lured sailors to crash on rocks where they sat and sang. Seductively sung in political waters, songs of equality and freedom can be dangerous. “From each according to his ability, to each according to his need,” is an enchanting verse; sung aggressively in government, it lures citizens to accept the poverty of conformity in classic communism. “Extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice”—as Goldwater told the 1964 GOP convention—tempts listeners to abandon all government rules and regulations. Carried to the extreme, complete freedom is anarchy. Carried to the extreme, complete equality results in autocracy.

In life, Greek philosophers advised doing “everything in moderation, and “nothing in excess.” That counsel applies to politics too.