Authoritarianism and resistance to diversity in the American South
Fred Slocum

Introduction

Politics in the American South evidences both change and continuity in the 21st century. The overriding change is the shift of many Southern whites out of the Democratic Party and into the Republican Party (Black and Black 1987, 2002; Glaser 2005). This change is so pronounced that in four of the past seven presidential elections (1984, 1988, 2000 and 2004), Democratic candidates have received no electoral votes in the 13 Southern states, the 11 former Confederate states plus Kentucky and Oklahoma, and carried only one state in 1980 and a minority of electoral votes in Bill Clinton's wins in 1992 and 1996. Furthermore, even after nationwide gains in the 2006 elections, Democrats hold only 5 of 26, or 19% of, Southern U.S. Senate seats, and 57 of 142, or 40% of, Southern U.S. House seats. Democratic gains in 2006 were concentrated in the Northeast and Midwest (Klinkner and Schaller 2006). In some Southern states, notably Texas, South Carolina, Georgia and Florida, Democrats are virtually irrelevant in state politics as well.

The continuity, I argue, is this: White Southerners, always hegemonic in defining the region's history, politics and culture, frequently demonstrate, and have demonstrated, strikingly strong resistance to diversity. While Southern white party loyalties have switched from majority Democratic to majority Republican, intolerance of difference appears woven into the region's political and social fabric, more so than in other regions. This observation draws substantial support from historical studies (Goldfield 2002), and other research examining specific elements of Southern culture, i.e. the Southern culture of honor (Nisbett and Cohen 1996), Southern Baptist and other evangelical Protestant religious traditions (Rosenberg 1989; Smith 1997; Green et al. 2003), and hostility toward organized labor (Clark 1997; Minchin 2006). An intolerance of difference and suppression of historically subordinate groups, while not unique to the South, nonetheless is expressed more strongly there.

This paper advances several arguments. First, judging from political conflicts and policy outcomes in the region, white Southerners appear to be more strongly disposed than most subgroups to resist diversity and insist on conformity and sameness. This is evident for numerous social cleavages, including race, gender, socioeconomic status, union status, religion, sexual orientation and ethnicity. Second, this pattern strongly resembles theoretical conceptions of authoritarianism (Altemeyer 1981, 1988, 1996; Feldman 2003; Stenner 2005). Moreover, both past studies and recent data provide evidence suggesting high levels of authoritarianism in the South. It follows, then, that Southerners, and especially white Southerners, constitute a probable reservoir for maintaining and transmitting authoritarian and diversity-resistant values. Third, the authoritarian tendency among Southern whites probably has partisan implications-- propelling many into the Republican Party, which today, often exemplifies authoritarian values in its policy platforms and candidates. Especially before 1960, the Democratic Party exemplified authoritarian values in the region, especially in race relations--but as the national Democratic Party increasingly embraced more anti-authoritarian and racially egalitarian values in the 1960s and 1970s, white Southerners began leaving the party in droves. It is likely that white Southerners have always gravitated toward the party that better reflects authoritarian values--today, that is the Republican Party.

This article begins by examining numerous events in Southern history and politics. These show a remarkably consistent tendency among white Southerners (always politically and economically dominant almost regionwide) to suppress diversity and enforce homogeneity--often with the backing of the state, and sometimes using threats, violence or both.

Southern History and Politics: Resistance to Diversity

Further examination of Southern history and politics reveals remarkably strong tendencies to resist and suppress diversity in the region. Throughout their post-Civil War history, white Southerners appear to (1) perceive high levels of outside threat, and (2) be willing to resort to extreme, sometimes violent actions to confront that threat--a pattern that resembles what Southern historian David Goldfield (2002) calls "still fighting the Civil War" in his book of the same name. Evidence supporting this point comes from examining a series of social divisions: race, gender, socioeconomic status, union status, religion, sexual orientation and in the post-9/11 era, ethnicity. Each furnishes striking evidence of white Southerners' resistance to diversity.

Race

During Reconstruction (1865-1877), federal troops occupied Southern states. After their withdrawal in 1877, white Southerners collectively vowed to never again accept federal interference in 'their' affairs (Key 1949; Black and Black 1987). Also, most Southern whites adopted a 'Lost Cause' mentality that positively redefined the Civil War as a conflict over the 'noble' principle of states' rights, not slavery and white domination of blacks. By 1890, white Southerners had used violence, electoral fraud, racial discrimination and other extreme measures to virtually shut blacks and the then-hated Republicans out of politics, and ensure 'home rule'--electoral dominance for conservative white Democrats (Key 1949). Southern Democrats then codified racial segregation and discrimination into law on a colossal scale-- enforcing voting discrimination and segregated schools, neighborhoods and public facilities. Moreover, whites ruthlessly enforced a social code in which blacks could never treat whites as social equals. The resulting long-duration racial caste system revealed an extreme version of resistance to diversity from roughly 1890 to 1965 (Black and Black 1987; Woodard 2006). Southern whites defined two 'outside' entities as potential mortal threats to the "Southern way of life." The federal government was deemed a potential enforcer of racial integration, and later, racial equality in voting. After 1890, Southern whites vowed to never again accept federal interference in "their" racial affairs. Blacks were widely stereotyped as lustful, lazy, lying and subhuman--lacking in intelligence and work ethic, and prone to violence, especially raping white women. These "rape myths" contributed to anti-black violence and numerous lynchings. Even a black man's looking at or speaking to a white woman in the "wrong" way could result in assault, arson, murder or being run out of town under threat of death (McMillen 1990).

To enforce social control over blacks, whites used extreme measures against "uppity Negroes": economic retaliation, such as arbitrary eviction and job termination, harassment, threats (including cross burnings) and property damage (including arson attacks, vividly illustrated in the 1988 movie Mississippi Burning). Frequently, whites also resorted to violence, including assaults, bombings, killings of civil rights leaders and lynchings. White supremacist violence included the brutal 1955 murder of 14-year-old Emmett Till for whistling at a white female store clerk in Money, Mississippi. Till, a Chicago native visiting relatives in Mississippi, was unaware of the South's strict social rules governing race relations.

Other violence included a 1963 church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama that killed four little girls; the 1964 murders of three civil rights workers near Philadelphia, Mississippi, and the segregationist riots attending the integration of Little Rock, Arkansas' Central High School in 1957 and the University of Mississippi in 1962. Mass violence included the 1898 riots in Wilmington, NC and the 1921 riots in Tulsa, OK--both instigated by white supremacist mobs bent on forcing blacks out of the community. Militant and incendiary rhetoric, too, was commonplace; segregationists routinely branded supporters of racial equality as "mongrelizers," "outside agitators," "Communists," "subversives," "race mixers," "nigger lovers" and so on. These cases clearly reveal relentless verbal and physical aggression against any who dared challenge white domination.

Certainly, federal civil rights laws and changing social attitudes have made the South and nation much

more racially egalitarian. Nonetheless, race remains the "800-pound gorilla" of Southern politics (Valentino and Sears 2005; Slocum 2004, 2007). Racial attitudes are more negative among Southern than non-Southern whites; more closely connected to Republican voting and identification among Southern, but not non-Southern, whites; and this relationship has been strengthening over time among Southern, but not non-Southern, whites (Valentino and Sears 2005). Racial appeals, coming primarily from Republicans, continue in Southern campaigns, such as Jesse Helms' 1990 "white hands" ad attacking opponent Harvey Gantt on affirmative action, Kirk Fordice's 1991 gubernatorial campaign in Mississippi, which relied on a panoply of racial symbols (welfare, crime and "quotas"), and most recently Tennessee's 2006 U.S. Senate race, via a Republican television advertisement that played to white fears over interracial dating (Rucker 2006). In addition, conflicts over Confederate flag displays and the striking racial polarization of the party system in the South illustrate how much racial divisions continue to structure Southern politics--to the benefit of the Republican Party, the majority party among Southern whites today.

Gender

Historically, the South was and is more male-dominated politically; Southern states cluster near the bottom, for example, in the representation of women in the state legislatures (Woodard 2006, 411). Historically, too, the ideal (white) "Southern woman" was deferential to white men, but always on alert against the depredations of black men, who were widely stereotyped as animals--sexually promiscuous and predisposed to raping white women--thus the "rape myths" that fueled many lynchings, including that of Emmett Till in Mississippi in 1955. Goldfield (2002) offers a historical account of the "pedestal" most white Southern women were placed upon--a pedestal that offered protection from black men but also came with strings attached--chiefly that she would cheerfully accept her place in society and leave public affairs to men. Women who violated these norms were often shunned and ostracized and lost the protection of the pedestal. Male dominance was recently reasserted in the Southern Baptist Convention's doctrinal statements that women could not serve as pastors (2000) and that wives should "graciously submit to their husbands" (1998). While the SBC is not alone in these beliefs, no other denomination has the numbers (16.5 million members, the US's largest Protestant denomination) and degree of cultural hegemony that the SBC has in the South.

Socioeconomic status

While not a uniquely Southern phenomenon, there is reason to suspect more tolerance for large income differences, and the view that the rich should dominate the poor, in the South than elsewhere. In Elazar's "traditionalistic political culture" (found chiefly in the South), it is widely expected that elites will rule government and the economy, and non-elites are certainly expected not to challenge the dominance of the elites, and perhaps not even vote (Elazar 1984). Traditionalistic culture, then, strongly accepts income-based social hierarchies. In my personal observation of the South, I have noticed what appears to be evidence of a wider range of incomes in rural areas. Near Oxford, MS, there are a few country mansions, but more numerous ramshackle homes and mobile homes, i.e. rock musician Neil Young's "tall white mansions and little shacks" (Southern Man). In Minnesota, rural areas suggest much more income equality. This may of course indicate a bias favoring income equality in Minnesota, but both Elazar's work and Southern history indicate a culture more accepting of inequality in much of the South. In the movie Norma Rae (1979), set in a small Southern textile mill town, millworker Sonny Webster tells the union organizer, "Big companies always get their way--everything goes to the rich man." The "low tax, low service" traditions more entrenched in Southern states place a minimal value on income redistribution downward, and not surprisingly, social welfare benefits in the South average the lowest of any region (Slocum 2007).

Religion

Most conflicts over prayer and religious symbols in public spaces have arisen in Southern states, where evangelical and fundamentalist Protestants are especially numerous. The 1925 Scopes trial in Tennessee was an early case of Southern authorities imposing religious conformity by banning the teaching of evolution in public schools. More recently, in Alabama, former chief justice Roy Moore launched well-publicized crusades (1995-2003) to display the Ten Commandments in courtrooms and the Alabama Supreme Court building. In 2004, the Texas Republican Party adopted platform language affirming that "America is a Christian nation, founded on Judeo-Christian principles." These actions indicate preference for, or even a clear imposition of, religious conformity--implicitly expressing hegemony of Judeo-Christian traditions over others. This pattern reveals resistance to religious diversity, as dominant (Judeo-Christian) traditions are exalted over others.

Very striking additional cases include the efforts by Southern school districts to establish classroom and intercom prayers in public schools or at school events, and stridently defend them against First Amendment Establishment Clause challenges in court, with little success. Indeed, families challenging these religious traditions have often faced ostracism, harassment, threats and worse. After Lisa Herdahl successfully challenged public-school prayer in Pontotoc County, Mississippi (Grunberg and Crane 1999), she was shunned in the community, could not find work anywhere in the county and received death threats; in school, her children were taunted as "atheists" and "devil worshippers." In Douglasville, Georgia, student Doug Jager challenged pre-football-game prayers in 1986, and in retaliation his family was bombarded with abusive and threatening telephone calls. In Pike County, Alabama in 1997, a Jewish family challenged public-school prayers in court, and again paid a heavy price. The children were called "Jew jokers," had swastikas drawn on their lockers and belongings, and a teacher forced a Jewish child to write an essay on "why Jesus loves me" as discipline (The Associated Press 1998). A teacher said that if "parents won't save souls, we have to"; ministers led Christian prayers at mandatory school assemblies; a Jewish child declined to bow his head during a classroom prayer, and a teacher forced his head down; and a school official said the conflict would end if the family would convert to Christianity. In 1998, the family and school district entered into a consent decree that required school officials to end overtly Christian prayer and religious practices, and act to prevent further religious harassment. After Joann Bell challenged school prayer in Little Axe, Oklahoma in 1981, she received bomb and death threats, was physically assaulted by a school employee, an arson fire destroyed her home and her son's pet goats were slashed. A school board member blithely stated of Bell, "people who play with fire get burned"; the arson attack, which destroyed the Bell home and belongings, followed shortly thereafter (Crabtree 1984). Eventually, Bell and co-plaintiff Lucille McCord won their case in the federal appeals courts, in Bell v. Little Axe Independent School District No. 70 (1985).

The federal courts, undoubtedly aware of the severe abuse faced by families who challenge school prayer, allowed plaintiff families to remain anonymous to protect them from retaliation in the Supreme Court case Doe v. Santa Fe Independent School District (2000), which overturned intercom prayers before high-school football games in Texas. These school prayer cases reveal imposition of religious conformity: worship like we do, or face retaliation. Striking in all these cases is the heavy pressure placed on children to conform to majority religious traditions, and the extreme and militant rhetoric, harassment and sometimes actual violence directed against families that continue to challenge religious practices against overwhelming majority opinion in their communities. This climate of coercion strikingly resembles the violence and intimidation faced decades earlier by white supporters of civil rights for blacks, and by pro-union workers and organizers.

Sexual orientation

Evangelical Christian traditions usually condemn homosexuality, and evangelicals have mobilized heavily in favor of gay-marriage bans. As of 2007, these bans had passed in 27 states, but by wider

margins in Southern states--usually with 75% or more in favor, even 86% in Mississippi (2004) and 81% in Tennessee (2006). Furthermore, before the Supreme Court's Lawrence v. Texas (2003) ruling overturning state anti-sodomy laws, a majority of non-Southern states had repealed their sodomy laws by legislative action, but no Southern state had done so. As of March 2003, 9 of 13 Southern states still had anti-sodomy laws on the books, and of the four that did not, all four got that way because of a state high court ruling (AR, GA, KY and TN).

Anti-gay statements from public officials, and anti-gay resolutions and legislation, all have a pronounced Southern tilt. As chief justice, Alabama's Roy Moore, of Ten Commandments fame, wrote a special concurring opinion in a custody case involving a lesbian mother, in which he stridently condemned her sexual orientation and implied that confinement and execution were proper penalties for homosexuality. In 1992, Alabama's legislature passed a law barring public funding for any group that "fosters or promotes a lifestyle or actions prohibited by the sodomy and sexual misconduct laws." Officials then invoked the law to bar funding for gay/lesbian/bisexual student groups at Auburn University and the University of South Alabama. The groups' legal challenge resulted in the law being overturned in federal court. Anti-gay resolutions were passed in Greenville County, SC and Cobb County, GA in 1993; the latter prompted organizers to relocate the 1996 summer Olympic volleyball competition outside Cobb County.

Courts in Virginia and Florida have denied lesbian mothers custody of their own biological children because of their sexual orientation, and Sen. Jim DeMint (SC) endorsed a ban on gay schoolteachers in South Carolina's Republican Party platform. In March 2004, Rhea County, TN commissioners briefly sought to legally ban gays and lesbians from living in the county. In 1997, Mecklenburg County, NC commissioners zero-budgeted county arts funding after county funds supported a play with gay themes, and forced county-funded youth counseling agencies to "out" gay or questioning teenagers to their parents or lose all county funding. Overall, anti-gay resolutions and actions are strikingly more frequent and intense in the Southern states, though Colorado voters' passage of Amendment 2 (1992) provides a rare non-Southern example. Collectively, these actions suggest a culture of greater hostility toward gays and lesbians, motivated by the apparent belief that they threaten traditional values. These actions targeting gays and lesbians also resemble the historical tendency of white Southerners to lash out at perceived "outside threats." Here, the perceived threat is moral, not racial--and is plausibly amplified by anti-outsider sentiments, in light of the 2004 Massachusetts Supreme Court ruling legalizing gay marriage, and the passage of civil unions for same-sex partners in Maine, Vermont, Connecticut, New Hampshire and New Jersey.

Union status

Historians such as Daniel Clark (1997) and Timothy Minchin (2006), and political scientists Merle and Earl Black (1987) have long documented the traditional hostility toward organized labor in the South--evidenced especially in Southern textile mills, where managers have used strikingly extreme methods to prevent their workers from joining unions. These actions, shown in the 1979 movie Norma Rae, include surveillance and harassment of suspected union supporters, often-illegal retaliatory firings and plant closures, fomenting racial divisions by telling whites that unionization will result in black domination of whites, and in earlier decades, killings of strikers and union supporters, as in the 1934 Honea Path, SC labor dispute (Applebome 1997, Ch. 7). In Barnesville, GA in 1938, a garment workers' union organizer was kidnapped, taken 60 miles out of town and ordered never to return by a mob led by businessmen bent on maintaining a union-free town (Applebome 1997, 191). In the South, unions were defined commonly as outside threats, and management commonly retaliated against unionized workers with the stretch-out and speed-up of machinery, retaliatory firings and mill or factory closures, and often outright refusal to negotiate any mutually acceptable contract, even after workers voted to unionize (Clark 1997). Here, the 'social conformity' and/or 'traditional value' enforced, then, is a union-free workplace and/or community.

The extreme actions to prevent unionization drives from succeeding represent a form of resistance to diversity (unionized workers).

Ethnicity in the Post-9/11 Era

A series of controversial statements by Southern lawmakers (all white, conservative Republicans) appears to favor profiling of Middle Easterners, Arab Americans and/or Muslims, or reveal a stereotype that they pose a security or cultural threat.

In an interview with a network of Louisiana radio stations (September 17, 2001), then-Rep. John Cooksey (R-LA) candidly revealed his profile of who should expect to be questioned in the investigation of the September 11 attacks:

"If I see someone who comes in that's got a diaper on his head and a fan belt wrapped around the diaper on his head, that guy needs to be pulled over. When you've got a group of people who are not American citizens, who are of Arab descent and they were involved in killing 5,000 Americans ... I think we can and should scrutinize people who fit that profile until this war on terrorism is over" (McKinney 2001).

Questioned about his remarks, Cooksey added, "that gets back to something called racial profiling." After Sikh Americans (many of whom wear turbans) and Arab Americans expressed outrage over his remarks, Cooksey issued a statement saying "the man I had on my mind was Osama bin Laden" and acknowledging a "poor choice of words."

Similarly, then-U.S. Representative (now Senator) Saxby Chambliss (R-GA) told a November 2001 gathering of Georgia law enforcement officers that an appropriate response to terrorism would be to "turn the sheriff loose and have him arrest every Muslim that crosses the state line" (CNN Crossfire 2002). Chambliss later expressed regret and apologized for the comment.

Two Republican U.S. representatives from North Carolina, Howard Coble and Sue Myrick, also made comments widely viewed as racially insensitive towards Middle Easterners. In a radio talk show (February 4, 2003), Coble defended as "appropriate at the time" President Franklin D. Roosevelt's decision to send Japanese Americans to internment camps during World War II, adding "some [Japanese Americans] were probably intent on doing harm to us. Just as some of these Arab Americans are probably intent on doing harm to us" (Morrison 2003). In 1988, Coble had opposed the congressional bill providing reparations to survivors of the internments.

Myrick, in a speech to the conservative Heritage Foundation on domestic terrorism (January 28, 2003), referred to Arab Americans and said, "Look who runs all the convenience stores across the country" (Morrison 2003). Myrick defended her remarks by saying she simply wanted to remind communities of the threat of terrorism, including "the illegal trafficking of food stamps through convenience stores for the purpose of laundering money to countries known to harbor terrorists." Myrick later said she did not intend to insult any ethnic group.

In December 2006, Rep. Virgil Goode (R-VA), in a letter to constituents, warned Americans to "wake up," adding that if stricter immigration laws are not passed, "there will likely be many more Muslims elected to office and demanding the use of the Koran" (Goldfarb 2006). Goode was referring to the 2006 election of Keith Ellison (D-MN), a Muslim, to Minnesota's 5th District U.S. House seat, and Ellison's planned use of the Koran at an unofficial swearing-in ceremony. Goode vowed to use the Bible at his swearing in, and added, "I fear that in the next century we will have many more Muslims in the United States if we do not adopt the strict immigration policies that I believe are necessary to preserve the values and beliefs traditional to the United States of America, and to prevent our resources from being

swamped." Goode has never retracted or apologized for his remarks.

One of these remarks could be shrugged off as an isolated incident. Five of them, all from conservative white Southern Republican lawmakers, seems more like a pattern: a desire to target Muslims, Arabs, and/or Middle Easterners, in light of the apparent perceived security threat they pose after the 9/11 attacks--or in Goode's case, perceived cultural threat. Each of these comments suggests a pronounced resistance to diversity, as indicated by support for profiling and/or negative stereotypes of Arab, Middle Eastern and/or Muslim Americans. If these lawmakers are so candid in revealing such stereotypes, it seems reasonable to suspect that many of their constituents share them.

Overall, Southern politics, more than politics in other regions, reveals a strikingly strong resistance to diversity. It was strongly expressed in race relations before 1965, when virtually every (white) elected official shared an obsession with maintaining the region's racial caste system by any means necessary. The South and nation have become far more racially egalitarian--but resistance to diversity is also evident on numerous dimensions besides race: gender, socioeconomic status, religion, sexual orientation, union status and ethnicity. Each of these social variables yields cases of hegemonic groups (whites, males, higher-income individuals, Christians, heterosexuals, union opponents and non-Arab, non-Muslim and non-Middle Eastern individuals, respectively) attempting to maintain their dominant status and suppress challenges from subordinate groups.

Understanding Authoritarianism

The Holocaust and the apparent willingness of many Germans to accept Adolf Hitler's Nazi regime and its atrocities prompted interest in researching what led people to accept fascist and Nazi rule. Attention soon focused on personality factors, leading to a cottage industry of research on "the authoritarian personality," based on the book of the same name (Adorno et al. 1950). As Adorno et al. (1950) conceived it, authoritarianism predisposed some people to follow authority blindly, attack perceived dissidents, uphold perceived traditional values, and often employ harsh or violent means of pursuing these aims. People with this cluster of personality traits, Adorno et al. argued, were especially likely to support fascist and anti-democratic governments. The publication of The Authoritarian Personality (1950) prompted intense interest and numerous follow-up studies establishing correlations between authoritarianism and numerous indicators of racial and political intolerance. However, further research unleashed a wave of intense conceptual and methodological criticism of "authoritarian personality" research. As a result, social scientists virtually abandoned research on authoritarianism for a generation. Social psychologist Robert Altemeyer (1981, 1988, 1996) virtually single-handedly revived the study of authoritarianism and its consequences. Thus, Altemeyer (1996) argued that "right-wing authoritarianism" (RWA) consisted of three measurable components: authoritarian submission to perceived established authorities, authoritarian aggression against perceived dissidents, and conventionalism, or support for traditional social norms.

More recently, Feldman (2003) and Stenner (2005) have sought to more systematically define authoritarianism and develop a theory of its origins and likely political consequences. The Feldman and Stenner approaches seem broadly consistent on two counts. First, both conceive of authoritarianism as a tendency to reject diversity and insist on sameness, as Stenner puts it (2005, 15; emphasis added). Feldman (2003, 48) poses the question "how highly will people value personal autonomy when it comes into conflict with their desire for social conformity?" Relatively speaking, high authoritarians or 'highs' value social conformity more; 'lows' value personal autonomy more. Second, Feldman and Stenner agree that authoritarian tendencies vary across time and circumstance; they are activated by perceived threat-- material, security related or cultural. Perceived threats also strengthen the connection between authoritarian predispositions and racial, moral and political intolerance (Stenner 2005).

Altemeyer (1996) further describes "high-RWA" individuals as fearful believers in a "dangerous world" threatened by "moral rot" and filled with predatory individuals and (in the post-9/11 era) terroristic threats. Furthermore, high-RWA individuals are more inclined to endorse extreme methods, including harsh treatment and punishment, against perceived dissidents and violators of traditional social norms. In the context of fighting terrorism in the post-9/11 era, then, it cannot be surprising that Sen. Trent Lott (R-MS) made a resoundingly "high authoritarian" comment after President Bush's warrantless domestic spying program was publicized. "I don't agree with the libertarians," Lott told the Washington Post. "I want my security first. I'll deal with all the details after that" (Eggen and Lane 2005).

Authoritarianism, Resistance to Diversity and Southern Politics

The most recent conceptualization of authoritarianism, that of Feldman (2003) and Stenner (2005), meshes exceptionally well with the tendency, strongly evident in Southern politics, to resist diversity. An alternate interpretation of the above cases might be that in the South there is simply a stronger resistance to changing the status quo. That is probably true--but frequently the "status quo" is an entrenched group-based dominance hierarchy (white over black; higher-income over lower-income; Christian over non-Christian; heterosexual over homosexual). Thus, when subordinate groups or minorities in the South challenge their status, they sometimes face strikingly vehement resistance and retaliation--as the families who challenged school prayer, union supporters, and supporters of racial equality all found. "Diversity" might mean unionized workers, schoolchildren who do not join Christian prayers, Muslims and/or gay or lesbian neighbors. As the historical cases above suggest, resistance to diversity is often strikingly strong in the American South.

Regional Differences in Authoritarianism: Past Studies

Some past studies suggest that authoritarianism is indeed higher in the South. Williams (1966) found that authoritarianism levels, measured with selected items from the F scale (Adorno et al. 1950) were higher among Southern than non-Southern respondents. Black and Black (1987, 62-70) examine "feeling thermometer" ratings (on a zero to 100 scale) of numerous groups given by white Southerners between 1972 and 1984. Responses were analyzed separately for middle-class and working-class Southern white respondents--but results were very similar for the two groups. The overriding finding is the warm ratings given to whites, Southerners, conservatives, Republicans, the police, and the military. Black and Black (1987, 61) describe these groups as "so overwhelmingly liked and valued that only one 'proper' response seems to have been possible," and "represent[ing] the emotional and cognitive importance of authority, stability, armed might in defense of the homeland, [and] regional and racial pride ..." In contrast, both middle-class and working-class white Southerners gave overwhelmingly cold ratings to four groups, perceived symbols of frontal challenges to authority and stability: gays and lesbians, marijuana users, black militants, and radical students. Black and Black (1987, 63) characterize these groups as "represent[ing] cultural and racial radicalism: strange people, strange ideas, very strange and threatening behavior." These studies, then, suggest the likelihood that white Southerners, at least between 1972 and 1984, were strong supporters of authoritarian values.

Altemeyer (1996, 291-294) studied RWA scores among U.S. lawmakers (state House and state Senate members), and found sizable differences in RWA scores by both party and region. On average, Republicans had substantially higher RWA scores than Democrats did. Within both parties, Southern lawmakers tended to cluster toward the high-RWA pole of Altemeyer's RWA scale. This tendency was more pronounced for Democratic lawmakers: Southern Democrats yielded RWA scores only slightly lower than Southern Republicans did. Non-Southern Republicans yielded much higher RWA scores than non-Southern Democrats did. Overall, Southern Republicans had the highest RWA scores; Southern Democrats and non-Southern Republicans had moderately high RWA scores; and virtually all medium-RWA or low-RWA lawmakers were non-Southern Democrats.

Although these data, considered together, are strongly suggestive, they alone do not provide very convincing evidence of higher authoritarianism in the Southern states. A more convincing case emerges from examining more recent data.

Regional Differences in Authoritarianism: Current Evidence

Data from the 2004 American National Election Study (ANES), using random samples of adult Americans, confirm the pattern apparent in past research, albeit with less-than-ideal indicators of authoritarianism. Unfortunately, major national surveys, including the ANES, do not contain extensive measures of authoritarianism, such as Feldman's (2003) 17-item scale measuring preference for conformity vs. diversity. However, the ANES, in 2004 and earlier years, does include four items measuring child-rearing values, which Stenner (2005, 23-24) argues represent a good measure of authoritarian predispositions. These items should allow a better test of the thesis of Southern vs. non-Southern differences in authoritarianism.

This author's analysis of 2004 ANES data reveals such regional differences do exist. I conceptualized region in three ways: region of current residence, region where the respondent primarily grew up, and a combined variable distinguishing respondents who both grew up in and currently live in the South.' Results are shown only for the third of these, which for Southerners captures the combined socialization effect of being raised in the South, plus the cultural exposure occasioned by living in the South today. Table 1 shows regional differences in authoritarian predispositions, measured using Stenner's (2005) four-item scale of child-rearing items. For ease of interpretation, I have arranged authoritarianism scores on a zero to one scale, with one representing more authoritarian values. The results indicate that authoritarianism levels are indeed higher among Southern than non-Southern respondents. Among all respondents, the mean authoritarian predisposition is .55 among non-Southern respondents, but .68 among Southern respondents (Table 1a). A somewhat surprising finding emerges when we examine white and black respondents separately (Tables 1b. and 1c.) These reveal that black respondents exhibit more authoritarian predispositions than whites do, (2) while the regional difference persists. Mean authoritarianism scores were .52 for non-Southern whites, .61 for Southern whites, .70 for non-Southern blacks, and. 80 for Southern blacks. All regional differences were statistically significant.

In sum, based on the indirect evidence from the work of Williams (1966), Black and Black (1987) and Altemeyer (1996), and more recent evidence from the 2004 ANES, we have reason to believe that authoritarianism is higher in the South than the non-South. As discussed above, numerous events in both Southern history and contemporary Southern politics suggest an abiding authoritarian streak among Southern whites, who have long dominated the region's politics, culture and economics. The concept of authoritarianism, as conceived both by Altemeyer (1996) and Stenner (2005) corresponds well with a resistance to diversity. The Republican Party is the primary political home for authoritarian and anti-diversity values, a point discussed further below. As such, Republicans will probably continue to dominate Southern politics for quite some time.

Conclusion: Authoritarianism's Republican, and Southern, Home

To be sure, authoritarianism is by no means a uniquely Southern phenomenon; "high authoritarians" exist in every state, and almost certainly in every nation. However, historically, Southern whites, who long have dominated the region's economy, social mores and politics, appear to have strikingly high levels of authoritarianism--a preference for social conformity (often government imposed) over individual autonomy and diversity (Feldman 2003; Stenner 2005).

Overall, there is strongly suggestive evidence that even today, Southern whites stand out as a remarkably

"high authoritarian" subgroup, willing to use government coercion to maintain both symbolic and material domination of currently hegemonic groups (whites, males, higher-income persons, Christians, heterosexuals and so on). This tendency repeatedly manifests itself in public opinion and policy outcomes: in continuing racial conflicts, anti-union actions, religious disputes, conservatism on gay and lesbian issues, maintenance of traditional gender roles, and willingness to target and profile Arabs and/or Muslims in the war on terrorism. These patterns in opinions and policy mesh well with theoretical conceptions of authoritarianism. First, these cases reveal Altemeyer's (1996) conventionalism, or support for traditional social values, and authoritarian aggression toward perceived outsiders or dissidents. Furthermore, the warm feelings toward the police and military from Black and Black's (1987) data suggest Altemeyer's (1996) third component, authoritarian submission to perceived established authorities. Second, consistent with newer theories of authoritarianism (Feldman 2003; Stenner 2005), Southern politics frequently reveals a persistent drive to enforce social conformity, often on moral or religious grounds, and enhanced in light of perceived threats (i.e. cultural and/or moral threats posed by gay/lesbian activists, abortion providers, feminists, people who challenge religion in the public schools, Muslims and secularists; security threats posed by Muslims, Arab and/or Middle Eastern Americans).

In the South, a tendency favoring high authoritarianism and policy outcomes consistent with it is nothing new. Williams (1966), studying regional differences in authoritarianism, found higher levels in the South--and discernable elements of authoritarianism remain woven into the region's political fabric. What has changed is the partisan preferences of most Southern whites. Black and Black (1987, 2002) and others have documented the partisan realignment among Southern whites, from majority Democratic to majority Republican. Many analysts explain this by focusing on racial conflict, and/or the parties' polarization on cultural and social issues. What I would add is this: frequently, white Southerners, the heart of Republican realignment in the region, have continually gravitated to the party that best exemplifies diversity-resistant and authoritarian values. During the pre-civil rights era, the Democratic Party in the South was the clear political home of authoritarian values, then expressed primarily in racial matters, but also apparent with respect to gender and religion. As the national Democratic Party increasingly embraced civil rights and greater moral tolerance, white Southerners left the party in droves (Black and Black 1987, 2002).

In Southern politics today, while some Democrats may embrace authoritarian values, the Republican Party is their clear political home. Region-wide, the Democratic Party is genuinely biracial, with blacks providing much of the party's support. Their collective experience and history of discrimination should provide a strong "brake" against the party's embracing authoritarian values too closely. Furthermore, the national Democratic Party and allied groups often embrace anti-authoritarian values, and Altemeyer (1996, 292) shows that non-Southern Democratic lawmakers have medium to low scores on his RWA scale. The average RWA score was 140.3 among Democrats, but 178.2 among Republicans (scores can range between 30 and 270). A second likely "brake" on Southern Democrats too closely embracing authoritarian values, then, should be the greater prevalence of anti-authoritarian values among national party officials and fellow Democrats. On racial issues, the national Democratic Party has embraced racial liberalism; the Republican Party, racial conservatism (Carmines and Stimson 1989). Racial conservatism today entails wholesale opposition to many social welfare programs and affirmative action, and support for the death penalty and other "law and order" positions on crime and drugs, and in the South, support for state displays of the Confederate flag. These positions have little appeal for blacks, but much more among white Americans/Southerners (Kinder and Sanders 1996; Glaser 1996). Altemeyer (1996) identifies many of these positions as being highly consistent with his notion of "right-wing authoritarianism."

For its part, the Republican Party is overwhelmingly white throughout the South, and Southern blacks lopsidedly identify and vote Democratic. Altemeyer (1996, 292) shows that Republican lawmakers overwhelmingly cluster on the high end of his RWA scale. The single highest RWA score was notched by Democrats in Mississippi's state Senate, but Republican state legislative delegations comprised the next

ten highest RWA scores. Among Republican lawmakers, the six highest-RWA delegations were all Southern: state House members from Tennessee, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina and Alabama, and state senators from Georgia. These results cannot be surprising. Southern Republicans generally have embraced a panoply of highly authoritarian values-imposition of social, moral and religious conformity with traditional values, usually those favored by religious-right groups (i.e. strict abortion bans, opposition to feminism and gay rights, and support for Christian-hegemonic school prayer and religious practices); staunch support for the Bush administration's aggressive actions in the war on terrorism, including profiling, torture, rendition, warrantless eavesdropping and open-ended detentions; and support for state violence and harsh punishment in education, international affairs and the criminal justice system. These patterns suggest that the Democratic Party in the South, struggling to bridge the generally anti-authoritarian and diversity-embracing values of the national Democratic Party and what I suspect are the authoritarian and diversity-resistant values common among Southern whites, will probably remain the minority party in Southern politics well into the foreseeable future.

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(1) I conceptualize "the South" as comprising 13 states: Oklahoma, Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia.

(2) The finding of higher authoritarianism levels among blacks may be a logical response among many in the black community to the history of brutal oppression many blacks faced in the pre-civil-rights South. In a climate where violating white-established racial norms could bring economic retaliation, violence and even death, black parents probably took unusual care to instill in their children recognition of their proper "place" in society and ensure they obeyed racial norms to make life more tolerable for self and family.

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Table 1. Regional and Racial Differences in Authoritarian
Predispositions

Table 1a. Authoritarian predispositions, by whether or not
respondents both grew up, and currently live in, the South
(all respondents).

Region Native to Standard

and Living In Mean Deviation Number of Cases

Non-South .5498 .2927 799
South .6790 .2646 266
Total .5820 .2912 1065

T-test for differences of means: -6.387, sig T = .000.

Table 1b. Authoritarian predispositions, by whether or not respondents both grew up, and currently live in, the South (whites only).

Region Native to Standard
and Living In Mean Deviation Number of Cases

Non-South .5223 .2886 622
South .6140 .2617 159
Total .5410 .2856 781

T-test for differences of means: -3.641, sig T = .000.

Table 1c. Authoritarian predispositions, by whether or not respondents both grew up, and currently live in, the South (blacks only).

Region Native to Standard
and Living In Mean Deviation Number of Cases

Non-South .7019 .2764 78
South .8022 .2365 79
Total .7524 .2612 157

T-test for differences of means: -2.444, sig T = .016.

In all tables, native Southerners who do not live in the South, and native non-Southerners who do live in the South, are included in the non-Southern row. Results were similar (not shown) when region was conceptualized separately as region now living in, and region grown up in. Authoritarian predispositions lie along a scale of 0 to 1. Construction of the scale otherwise follows the procedure found in Feldman and Stenner (1997). Cronbach's alpha for this four-item scale is .66.

The child-rearing items ask respondents to indicate which of two qualities is more important for children to be raised to have: independence or respect for elders; curiosity or good manners; self-reliance or obedience; and being considerate or being well-behaved. In each case the italicized option is the more authoritarian response.

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