Also by Stuart Stevens

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Malaria Dreams: An African Adventure

Night Train to Turkistan: Modern Adventures Along China's Ancient Silk Road

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PROLOGUE
IT WAS ALL A LIE

I have no one to blame but myself. I believed. That's where it all started to go wrong. I was drawn to a party that espoused a core set of values: character counts, personal responsibility, strong on Russia, the national debt actually mattered, immigration made America great, a big-tent party invited all. Legislation would come and go, compromises would be necessary, but these principles were assumed to be shared and defined what it meant to be a Republican for the last fifty years.

What a fool I was. All of these immutable truths turned out to be mere marketing slogans. None of it meant anything. I was the guy working for Bernie Madoff who actually thought we were really smart and just crushing the market. What I missed was one simple reality: it was all a lie.

I come to this not out of bitterness but out of sadness. It's not that I failed. I was paid to win races for Republicans, and while I didn't win every race, I had the best win-loss record of anyone in my business. So yes, blame me. Blame me when you look around and see a dysfunctional political system and a Republican Party that has gone insane. To be sure, others share blame, but if there is any sane path forward for something resembling a conservative governing philosophy in America—and I'm not sure there is—it must start with honesty and accountability. I have this crazy idea that a return to personal responsibility begins with personal responsibility.

It is a strange, melancholy feeling to turn sixty-five and realize that what you have spent a good portion of your life working for and toward was not only meritless but also

destructive. Among the many Republicans who find Donald Trump somewhere between distasteful and abhorrent, there are two distinct tendencies. One is to say that Trump isn't a real Republican. The other is to say he is just an "unconventional president" and focus on his policies.

Both are wrong.

As much as I'd love to go to bed at night reassuring myself that Donald Trump was some freak product of the system—a "black swan," as his ludicrously unqualified son-in-law says—I can't do it. I can't keep lying to myself to ward off the depressing reality that I had been lying to myself for decades. There is nothing strange or unexpected about Donald Trump. He is the logical conclusion of what the Republican Party became over the last fifty or so years, a natural product of the seeds of race, self-deception, and anger that became the essence of the Republican Party. Trump isn't an aberration of the Republican Party; he *is* the Republican Party in a purified form.

I saw the warning signs but ignored them and chose to believe what I wanted to believe: the party wasn't just a white grievance party; there was still a big tent; the other guys were worse. Mostly, though, I just didn't think about it. I loved to win and I won a lot. I loved the feeling that I had a big lever and could move if not the world, then a big enough hunk of it to make a difference.

Donald Trump didn't hijack the Republican Party and force it to bend to his will, abandoning so many avowed "bedrock" principles. How do I know this? I was there and, yes, I contributed. This is not an "I am better than them" plea. I'm not. But I was more than just a witness to this. I spent 2016 predicting that Donald Trump would not win because I refused to believe what Donald Trump proved about Republicans, about myself, could be true.

I was wrong.

Hold Donald Trump up to the mirror and that bulging, grotesque orange face *is* today's Republican Party. Working

intensely in politics is joining a tribe, and if you do it for many years, a comfortable familiarity begins to define the experience. Do it professionally at a high level with success, and at a certain point you look around and you know where you belong in that tribe. Every two years you work in governor and Senate races, and every four years you probably end up toward the top of a presidential campaign. I've worked in five presidential races. Four out of five we won the nomination. Two out of five we won it all.

This is a book I never thought I'd write, that I didn't want to write. But it's the book I now must write. It's a truth to which I can bear witness. Many will argue that my view of the Republican Party is distorted by my loathing of Trump. The truth is that Trump brought it all into clarity and made the pretending impossible.

A word of caution on what this book is not. Those looking for this to be a detailed indictment of sins and horrors committed by those I worked for and with will be disappointed. I am not writing to settle scores or name names. This is no bill of indictment to prepare for the political war crimes trials of the future. There is a collective blame shared by those of us who have created the modern Republican Party that has so egregiously failed the principles it claimed to represent. My *j'accuse* is against us all, not a few individuals who were the most egregious.

Yes, it was all a lie. But this is the truth.

1

RACE, THE ORIGINAL REPUBLICAN SIN

> You start out in 1954 by saying, "Nigger, nigger, nigger." By 1968 you can't say "nigger"—that hurts you. Backfires. So you say stuff like forced busing, states' rights and all that stuff.
>
> —Lee Atwater, 1981[1]

I played the race card in my very first race.

It was 1978 and my first client was running for Congress in Mississippi. His name was Jon Hinson. He had been chief of staff to a Mississippi congressman named Thad Cochran, who was now running for the Senate. (Actually, back then they called the head staffers "administrative assistants," or AAs, but as government became more about positioning for that next job and less about service, that sounded too much like "secretaries," so the more elevated "chief of staff" became common. What lobbying shop wants to pay $500,000 for a former AA?) In high school I had been a page when Hinson ran the congressional office, and I'd kept in touch when visiting the office on trips to D.C.

Hinson was running against the son of Senator John Stennis, a Mississippi icon of the Democratic Party. The son, John Hampton Stennis, was a state representative, and it was assumed he would win easily. I was in film school then at UCLA, and Hinson called and asked if I could make television commercials for his campaign. I told him I didn't know how to

make commercials, that I just made silly little films and wrote scripts I couldn't sell. "That doesn't matter," he said. "You have to do it. I can't afford to pay anyone who does this for real." In retrospect, this might not have been the most compelling pitch. But like anyone who has gone to film school, I was eager to get out and actually do something even vaguely related to film, so I said yes.

I'd been one of those kids who loved politics and campaigns and had walked precincts since the 1967 "William Winter for Governor" campaign in Mississippi. Winter ran against the last avowed segregationist to be elected governor, John Bell Williams, and it was a race full of death threats and drama. Winter lost, but I fell in love with politics and read Teddy White's *Making of the President, 1960* over and over.[2] It seemed a strange and intoxicating world, and when I left film school and started working in the Hinson campaign, I instantly felt at home. There was this sense of doing something that might actually *matter*. If I came up with the right ad, I might make a little history—or at least that's what I told myself. It was the tiniest bit of history—a Mississippi congressional seat—but it seemed infinitely more consequential than student films and debating what was the greatest opening camera move in cinema. The only problem was we were losing.

Stennis was a towering figure in Mississippi, and his name on the ballot was the obvious default choice for voters. Hinson was right when he said he couldn't afford to hire anyone, because no one thought he would win and for good reason. We raised some money, put up a few positive ads, and moved comfortably into second place, which is where we seemed stuck. The problem was that the congressional district, which included a lot of Jackson, Mississippi, and Vicksburg, was around 30 percent African American and, true to form, Hinson was getting less than 10 percent of that vote.

Thad Cochran was facing the same problem in his Senate race. No Republican had been elected statewide in Mississippi

since Reconstruction, mostly because there really wasn't much of a functioning Republican Party in Mississippi. Cochran had won a congressional race against a very weak Democrat and then relied on incumbency to win easy races, but every other member of the Mississippi congressional delegation was Democratic. In his Senate race, Cochran had one great advantage: Charles Evers, the brother of the assassinated civil rights leader Medgar Evers, was running as an independent. Not surprisingly, he was drawing a significant portion of the African American vote. With the bulk of the black vote going to a third-party candidate, the race between the Republican and the Democrat largely came down to a fight for white voters. And that was a fight Cochran was winning. He was a young, likable attorney from Jackson and had a strong base in his former congressional district. Evers had no chance of winning, but he was enabling Cochran to move into first place.

What we needed in the Hinson campaign was a like dynamic of an independent African American drawing black votes from the Democrat. And we had one: Evan Doss Jr., a thirty-year-old African American, had qualified to run as an independent for the congressional seat. The problem was that he wasn't famous like Charles Evers, so few, including those in the black community, knew he was running. So I did the obvious thing: I made ads that showed the Republican, the Democrat, and independent, Evan Doss. I did it like a public service announcement: "In the Fourth Congressional District, three candidates are running." I put all three on the screen with their names. "Jon Hinson is the Republican nominee. John Hampton Stennis is the Democratic nominee. Evan Doss is running as an independent and would be the first African American candidate elected to Congress in Mississippi since Reconstruction."

That was it. I thought it was terribly clever, and it didn't bother me a bit on any "I'm playing the race card" kind of level. What could be wrong with informing voters of the choice they faced? And it worked beautifully. On Election Day, Hinson won

with 51.6 percent of the vote followed by John Hampton Stennis with 26.4 percent and Evan Doss with 19 percent.[3] Every vote for Doss was a vote that would have gone to Stennis. In the end, Hinson might have won without the black independent, but it would have been very, very close.

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In my first race I had stumbled onto a truth as basic and immutable as the fact that water freezes below thirty-two degrees Fahrenheit: race was the key in which much of American politics and certainly all of southern politics was played. It was really very simple: the Democratic candidate needed 90-plus percent of black votes to win. If a significant portion voted for a third party, the Republican would win.

It hadn't always been this way. Before 1964, Republican presidential candidates could expect to get between 30 and 40 percent of the African American vote. Dwight Eisenhower got 39 percent in 1956. Four years later, Richard Nixon campaigned with Jackie Robinson and won 32 percent of black voters. In 1964, Barry Goldwater opposed the Civil Rights Act, and his black support plummeted to 7 percent. Since 1964, no Republican presidential candidate has broken 17 percent with African American voters, and by 2016 only 3 percent considered themselves Republican.[4]

Politics is in many ways a perfect marketplace. Candidates and parties learn very quickly what works and what doesn't and focus time, energy, and money on the share of the marketplace that pollsters tell them is accessible to persuasion or motivation. Since 1964, Republicans have learned that they will have little success in appealing to black voters. It's not that most campaigns didn't make at least some effort, but it was always done with the knowledge that breaking 10 percent would be a significant achievement.

What happens if you spend decades focused on appealing to white voters and treating nonwhite voters with, at best, benign

neglect? You get good at doing what it takes to appeal to white voters. That is the truth that led to what is famously called "the southern strategy." That is the path that leads you to becoming what the Republican Party now proudly embraces: a white grievance party.

All my adult life in politics, I've heard Republicans blame our problems with black voters on "how" we communicated with the "minority community." The Republican Party has hired an entire cottage industry of black consultants to help candidates, campaigns, and elected officials crack the code of how to talk to African Americans, as if there were some linguistic issue blocking the party from returning to the party of Abraham Lincoln. It's all nonsense, and black voters get that it's nonsense.

The reason African Americans overwhelmingly reject Republicans isn't based on word choices or phrasing. It's based on policy. It isn't *how* Republicans are talking to black voters that results in 90 percent or more of those voters refusing to vote for Republicans. It's *what* the Republicans are doing, once elected. The fact that the Republican establishment is so invested in the myth that their problems are a matter of language is revealing and self-damning. At the root of it is a deep condescension that they—the de facto White Party of America—know what is best for black folks, and it's unfortunate these black folks don't seem to get it but, you know, they are different and we have to talk to them in a language they can understand.

The reality is just the opposite. Since 1964, black voters have heard the Republican Party with exquisite clarity; more important, they have seen what Republicans are doing once in office. It's summed up nicely in a chapter called "The GOP's Rise as 'the White Man's Party' " in *Dog Whistle Politics* by Ian Haney López: "Where in 1962 both parties were perceived as equally, if tepidly, supportive of civil rights, two years later 60 percent of the public identified Democrats as more likely to

pursue fair treatment, versus only 7 percent who so identified the Republican Party."[5] Barry Goldwater ran on a carefully crafted platform of coded racism that contradicted his previous support of civil rights legislation. As Walter De Vries and Jack Bass wrote in the 1978 *Emerging Coalitions in American Politics,*

> The Republican decision to exploit the race issue and abandon the option of becoming a party of reform manifested itself in the 1961 speech in Atlanta by Barry Goldwater to a gathering of Southern Republicans. "We're not going to get the Negro vote as a bloc in 1964 and 1968, so we ought to go hunting where the ducks are," he declared. Goldwater then spelled it out, saying that school integration was "the responsibility of the states. I would not like to see my party assume it is the role of the federal government to enforce integration in the schools."[6]

The "ducks" were white voters, and in 1964, of the six states Goldwater carried, five were in the old Confederacy (the other being his home state of Arizona). African American support for Republicans fell off a cliff in 1964 and has never returned. As Hispanic and other nonwhite support plummets for Republicans, I hear many in the party assure themselves it is temporary and will "bounce back" as soon as the "right" leader emerges for the party. That's a hopeful fantasy, as the example of 1964 proves.

When Jon Hinson beat Senator Stennis's son in my first congressional race, it received some attention in national political circles as an upset. Suddenly I found candidates interested in hiring me to make television commercials for their campaigns. It was how I stumbled into becoming a political consultant. I found I could work in campaigns for a short time and have the off-season to try to write books and articles. At the time no one would pay me much to write, so it was an easy way

to make a living doing what was in effect seasonal work, sort of like migrant labor work but indoors and a lot easier.

A few years later I was working in the first congressional campaign for a young Florida banker named Connie Mack. He was running in a newly created district around Fort Myers, Florida, that was created to be a safe Republican seat. His toughest campaign was in the Republican primary, and after that it seemed fairly certain he would win the general election. (He went on to win with 65 percent of the vote.) It was a predominantly white district, but for some reason the Republican National Committee sent down an African American consultant to coach the campaign and candidate on how to maximize appeal to black voters. It was hyped as a "highly important" meeting with a great drumroll from Washington.

I was still naive enough to think there might be some secret language we could learn that would allow us to move the hearts of at least a substantial number of black voters. We had a simple storefront campaign headquarters. It reminded me of the scenes from Teddy White's *Making of the President,* and every time I walked into it, I felt like a character of White's, playing out in my head the drama of coming behind in the West Virginia primary when Kennedy beat Humphrey. It made the endeavor seem far grander than a routine election of a nice-guy banker who had run mostly because he was bored and had a name that still meant something to the older snowbirds in the district. (Connie Mack's grandfather and namesake managed the Philadelphia Athletics for their first fifty seasons.) Our pollster, Arthur Finkelstein, an intense mad genius who had specialized in electing hard-right candidates like Jesse Helms, muttered to Connie in one poll briefing, "Every time an ambulance goes by, you lose a voter."

For this critical meeting with the African American consultant, we were summoned to a small conference room at a local hotel. It was an all-day meeting and catered. I had never

been to a catered meeting before. Our small staff gathered with Connie and his wife and the RNC consultant. He was dressed impeccably in an elegant suit with a blue shirt that had a white collar. He was wearing Gucci loafers, which I wouldn't have known except later one of the young staffers, who was gay, noted with grudging admiration that they were nice shoes. (Just about every Republican campaign I've worked on had a sizable gay contingent of staffers. The more conservative the candidate, the greater seemed the percentage of gay staffers. The correlation between the conservatism of a Republican candidate and the number of gay staffers seems so reliable that in a later campaign when there was discussion among the staff of the candidate's sexual orientation, I could declare with some certainty, "I don't think our guy is conservative enough to be gay." The point was accepted, and I later heard a young press operative trying to explain this to a baffled reporter who, thank God, did not quote him.)

In 1982, there was near 10 percent unemployment nationally, and jobs were the number one issue in just about every race, including the Thirteenth District of Florida. The RNC consultant, who had a deep, resonating voice, began by saying that black voters were just like white voters in that what they cared about were good jobs and a stronger economy. Since then, in my decades working in Republican politics, I have heard variations on this theme countless times, referring to black voters, Hispanic voters, Asian voters—any nonwhite voters: they care about the same issues as white voters. This is one of those insidious half-truths that conceal a deeper, more important truth. Yes, pretty much all voters do care about jobs. But to say a white college-educated male or female cared about jobs in the same way as an African American is delusional. It was akin to saying that everyone would like not to get shot and that this truth means the same to a white suburban high school student in Des Moines as it does to a black teenager in Chicago's K-Town. It was a truth asserted with such disregard for specifics that it became a building block of a larger

falsehood. Feed generations of Republicans these easily digestible bromides, and it isn't hard to understand the failure of Republicans to grasp the meaning of Black Lives Matter. The cry "Don't all lives matter?" is just another variation on the assumption that jobs mean the same to all voters.

The one African American in the room stood before us and declared, "The issue in this race isn't black and white but green." At the time this phrase struck me as somewhat ingenious with a hint of the profound. Over the next thirty-some-odd years, I would hear this line over and over, even though Republicans kept losing black voters. But then I just nodded, as did everyone in the room, and smiled appreciatively at being graced with this wisdom. "It's good you are talking about jobs," the consultant said, directing it to Connie Mack. "But unless you change the way you talk about jobs, black folk just won't hear your message."

We hung on every word. I knew from our polling that the district's black voters favored the Democratic candidate on the jobs issue overwhelmingly, so there was no arguing that we were failing to reach these voters. The consultant from Washington was right.

"Here is how you get black voters to support you on jobs." He then turned to the whiteboard, where he had written "Good Jobs." With great deliberateness, he crossed out "Good" and wrote "Meaningful." "That's the key," he said. "Black voters don't believe you if you just talk about 'good' jobs. You need to talk about 'meaningful' jobs."

I'm embarrassed to say I furiously took notes. For the rest of the campaign, we tried to talk about "meaningful" jobs. Of course it meant nothing. Connie won the election and was crushed with black voters. Two years later, the man known as "the great communicator," Ronald Reagan, won forty-nine states. But, like Connie, he was crushed with black voters, who went for Walter Mondale at over 90 percent.

Today, in the age of Donald Trump, the most openly racist

president since Andrew Johnson or his hero Andrew Jackson (to the extent a know-nothing narcissist is capable of having a hero), many Republicans who find Trump repulsive or at least consider him abrasive and uncouth hark back to Reagan as the standard compared with whom Trump is woefully inadequate.

This is true in areas like foreign policy, where the Republican Party has gone from "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" to a Republican president who responds to Vladimir Putin like a stray dog, eager to follow him home. But in the area of race, there is a direct line from the more genteel prejudice of Ronald Reagan to the white nationalism of Donald Trump. In the glow of nostalgia around a smiling Reagan faded into the California sunset, Republicans have forgotten, have discounted, or, perhaps for some, still secretly admire that Ronald Reagan wielded race as a magnet to attract disaffected white Democrats. When Reagan attacked "welfare queens," white voters heard it and understood the unspoken accusation just as they did when George Wallace did the same. In the 1976 campaign, Reagan introduced his famous welfare fraud, a black woman in Chicago: "She used 80 names, 30 addresses, 15 telephone numbers to collect food stamps, Social Security, veterans' benefits for four nonexistent deceased veteran husbands, as well as welfare. Her tax-free cash income alone has been running $150,000 a year."[7] Reagan's "welfare queen" was likely an exaggerated description of a woman exposed in 1974 articles in both the *Chicago Tribune* and *Jet* magazine. As much as many of us—yes, I include myself in this group—would like to, even need to, separate Reagan from Trump, the welfare-queen theme weaponized race and deceit in exactly the same ways employed by Donald Trump. There is a small kernel of truth in it—the woman used four, not eighty names, and the total fraud was $8,000—but when four becomes eighty and $8,000 total becomes $150,000 a year, Reagan is just lying. The majority of all welfare goes to white Americans and always has, but the specificity of a woman in Chicago makes the racial appeal clear.

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In the 2012 Romney campaign, I made several ads about welfare reform. The impetus was a waiver that the Obama administration gave in the summer of 2012 to states that allowed them to reduce or eliminate work requirements. The result was a firestorm of criticism. Our argument was that Barack Obama had never been enthusiastic about the Clinton welfare reforms in the 1990s—he opposed them when they were first introduced, and in the 2008 campaign refused to say if he would have signed them into law if he was president—and that this was a deliberately vague back door to allowing states to reduce work for welfare requirements. It was put best by Douglas Besharov, a public policy professor at the University of Maryland, who is credited with helping persuade Hillary Clinton to support the 1996 law. He was quoted in an article by the *Chicago Tribune* columnist Steve Chapman:

> "If the Obama administration believes in work requirements, why write something so broad?" Besharov asked me. "If I believed in the work requirements, I wouldn't put in language encouraging states to lift them all."[8]

In the Romney campaign, we saw this as a specific example of different governing philosophies. As Molly Ball wrote in *The Atlantic,* "It's not much of a stretch to conclude that the waivers the administration is soliciting, if they come to pass, would result in more people getting welfare benefits. The question is whether that's a good thing, and where you stand on that depends on your politics."[9]

That was the fight we wanted to be in, a differing governing philosophy about the role of government. In Massachusetts, where I worked in governor races for William Weld, his position on welfare reform had been central to his campaigns, and the

all wildly popular. For a political party that espouses to admire business so much and wants to run government like a business, ignoring those who are selling like crazy in the toughest markets is self-defeating but very telling. The RNC endorsed Roy Moore but ignores moderate governors. What else do you need to know?

The path followed by the two major parties today was laid by each in the 1960s. In 1964, George Wallace ran against Lyndon Johnson after the notoriety he had gained for "standing in the schoolhouse door" when the University of Alabama was integrated.[13] (We now know this was carefully orchestrated with Attorney General Bobby Kennedy.) He entered three primaries —Wisconsin, Indiana, and Maryland—and won about a third of the vote. The same year, Goldwater was the conservative candidate in the Republican primary, while moderates desperately tried to settle on one candidate to oppose him. Governors William Scranton of Pennsylvania, Nelson Rockefeller of New York, and George Romney of Michigan split the moderate votes, and Goldwater won easily. At the Democratic National Convention, there was a fight over which delegates to seat from Mississippi: the all-white (and segregationist) Democratic Party regulars or the integrated Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. A compromise was struck that largely hid the deep division between the two. Goldwater carried only states from the Confederacy, plus Arizona.

But what if George Wallace had won the Democratic primary? What if the Democratic establishment had then accepted Wallace? It's safe to say the Democratic Party would not resemble its current form. The rejection of Wallace was as much a statement for the Democratic Party as the acceptance by Trump of the Republican Party.

It isn't hard to argue that the Democratic Party has often disappointed the trust placed in it by African American voters. The Hillary Clinton campaign of 2016 was in many ways

running against the Bill Clinton campaign of 1992. He campaigned on the death penalty and pushed federal funding to help pay for 100,000 more cops, largely in urban areas, with the result that the incarceration rate of African Americans increased dramatically. Hillary Clinton made "mass incarceration" an issue, and the mothers of slain black youths spoke at the 2016 Democratic National Convention.

During an NBC interview in 1979, Bayard Rustin, one of the organizers of Martin Luther King's March on Washington and one of the more fascinating figures in the civil rights movement, was blunt about frustrations with the civil rights bill and its aftermath:

> People have to understand that although the civil rights bill was good and something for which I worked arduously, there was nothing in it that had any effect whatsoever on the three major problems Negroes face in the North: housing, jobs, and integrated schools....[T]he civil-rights bill, because of this failure, has caused an even deeper frustration in the North.[14]

But the inadequacy of legislation supported by Democrats is far different from a calculated effort to appeal to white voters by manipulating the race issue. One is a failure of policy. The other is a moral failure. In an October 5, 1971, White House memorandum from "Research" to the White House chief of staff, H. R. Haldeman, headed "Dividing the Democrats," the authors went through various elaborate ways the Nixon White House and campaign could manipulate racism to help Nixon's reelection campaign. It was written by Pat Buchanan and Kevin Phillips, who both went on to play pivotal roles in the development of the party, and it was based on the assumption there was little Nixon could do to attract black voters, so the focus should be on utilizing black voters' support of Democrats to alienate white voters. The memo is a playbook for how best

to play the race card, and Republican candidates have used similar tactics for decades. As Buchanan and Phillips recommended to Nixon,

> Fourth Party Candidates: Top-level consideration should be given to ways and means to promote, assist and fund a Fourth Party candidacy of the Left Democrats and/or the Black Democrats. There is nothing that can so advance the President's chances for re-election—not a trip to China, not four-and-a-half percent unemployment—as a realistic black Presidential candidate.

The memo voiced frustration at not being able to communicate a positive message to black voters and a sense of resentment that Nixon's efforts at outreach to black voters had gone unappreciated. It concluded that nothing positive would have much effect, so the logical and best course was to minimize the impact of black voters in various ways. This was the Nixon strategy in 1972. It was the Trump strategy in 2016. It was so obvious that even the Russians adopted it, attempting to instigate tensions among black voters to help Trump win. The memo continues,

> Note: Since taking office, the President has increased by 500 percent—from $400 million to $2 billion—the food stamp and food assistance funding and he still gets it in the neck for "starving the poor." Methinks there would have been more gratitude and greater awards if these funds had been directed to the President's potential friends in the working class, and their interests.
>
> Black Complaints: As we did with Muskie we should continue to champion the cause of the Blacks within the Democratic Party; elevate their complaint of "being taken for granted."[15]

Republicans did still believe in what Reagan said. But to most of them, it meant society should hold responsible those who they believe are most likely to break the law, that is, blacks or other nonwhites like the Mexican "rapists" Trump railed against when launching his campaign.[18] The same did not apply to whites. So many Republicans embraced Trump's view that they were victims, as was he, because they had actually believed this all along. Theirs was a white birthright, and the rise of nonwhites was an unjust usurping of their rights.

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The similarities of George Wallace and Donald Trump are striking, from attacking the news media to railing against elites, all played in the key of racism. This isn't an aberration or a sudden wrong turn by the Republican Party. The Nixon White House studied Wallace and deliberately tried to mobilize his race-based support without alienating voters who were uncomfortable with Wallace's style. The Buchanan-Phillips memo outlines the approach:

> Regional Fissures: South versus North. Here the dividing line is essentially that of the race issue; but it goes further into the "liberalism" of the national Democratic Party leaders, and major candidates, which does not sit well with the essential "suburban conservatism" and even "Wallaceism" of Democrats in the South. To force a choice here, we need more than just rhetoric and mailings. Actions taken by the President and Administration are decisive here.[19]

To their "credit," the Nixon White House realized that the core of playing the race card was about substantive legislative and judicial choices, not merely language: