



From Democrat to Republican:

*A
Southern Black
Woman's Journey
to Freedom*

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Chapter 1



My Defection Isn't Common, But It Should Be

A few weeks ago, I was asked to write about how a black woman born and raised in rural southern poverty eventually found herself in the Republican Party.

In pondering my journey, I realized the answer was not simple and straightforward. Like many blacks, I was a staunch Democrat without really thinking about how that came about.

Being black, Christian, and Democrat were as natural as breathing for me. Being anything else would have been evidence of a lack of common sense.

It took me many years before I met and got to know individual Republicans. At first, I eyed them with great suspicion—the same suspicion I experience today when I tell other blacks I am Republican.

Such deep-rooted suspicion probably comes from a fear that the person standing in front of me is an opportunist seeking personal gain.

There was a time when I could not think of a valid reason for a black person to affiliate with Republicans.

But my biases were a gut reaction based on what I thought I knew. There was no logic to it; no looking at facts or contemplating the historical differences between the parties and their platforms.

Like many Democrats, I believed the Republicans were the party of the rich and the Democrats the party of the poor, working class. I also believed that the Republican Party had more than its fair share of racists. When racism occurred among Democrats, I explained it away. Pure rationalization.

If someone had told me thirty years ago that I would someday become a Republican, I would have laughed in their face. Yet, here I am now, a card-carrying Republican who has run for office, campaigned for winning and losing candidates, and attended the inauguration of President Donald J. Trump.

Although I identify as a Republican, my most important identification is as a follower of Jesus Christ. Secondly, I identify as a constitutional conservative, with my Republican identity coming in a distant third.

As best I can, I will share with you the factors I believe led me to become a Republican—and why I believe more African Americans should make the change between the two parties.



Chapter 2



Why I Became a Democrat

I was born in Chamblissburg, a small hamlet in Southwestern, Virginia between Lynchburg and Roanoke. During the early part of my life, we lived in what can only be described as a shack that was home to nine people.

My family would eventually grow to include 12 children—seven boys and five girls. Neither my mother, father, stepfather nor any of my siblings finished high school. My father had a third-grade education, my mother a tenth grade, and my stepfather no education at all.

If we had lived in the city, we would have been considered 'underclass.' We were poorer than any of the other poor people around us.

The bright spots in my life were my grandparents, Lydia and Thomas Thompson. They had eked out a life that might be considered solid working class. They eventually purchased land and built a home, only for it to burn down when I was 11 or 12 years old. The house was within walking distance of the shack, a mile or so away. My stepfather was a laborer doing odd jobs, and my mother never worked outside the home.

I can't ever remember anyone in my family discussing politics in terms of Democrats and Republicans. What I do remember are a lot of discussions about white people. How they lived and what they thought of us.

At elementary school in the segregated South, teachers would discuss white people and what we could expect once integration occurred. I was born in 1954, the same year that the [Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka](#) Supreme Court case was decided, ending school desegregation, although it would take until 1967 or 1968 before integration reached Bedford County, Virginia (I started school in 1960).

Segregation and white resistance were just the way things were in the South. It was a part of the country that was solid Democrat. It fostered an environment not conducive to discussions of two-party politics. I watched the civil rights movement on television and listened to politicians' speeches, but I had no sense of party differences at the national level; nor did I understand what was happening in my state.

Virginia Politics, and the Democrats Who Blocked the Civil Rights Movement

Virginia politics was dominated by [Harry F. Byrd, Sr.](#) and what was referred to at the time as the powerful Byrd Machine. Byrd served as governor from 1925-29 and later as a U.S. senator from 1933-1965. By the time he left Congress, the political landscape had changed dramatically with the passage of three major Civil Rights Acts. His son, Harry F. Byrd, Jr., followed his footsteps and served in the U.S. Senate from 1966-1982 as an Independent who caucused with Democrats. Byrd, Jr., like his father, was a staunch conservative who defended the state's massive resistance to integration that his father spearheaded.

Byrd, Sr. did not fight civil rights and integration alone. [Howard W. Smith](#), another Democratic Virginia senator who served in Congress from 1955-1967, was his ally. Smith became the chair of the powerful Senate Rules Committee in 1964. Armed with enormous power, he was positioned to block civil rights legislation and successfully prevented most bills from reaching the floor.

As a 10-year-old child, I had no idea that I lived in a one-party state dominated by white segregationists who were relentlessly fighting to deny rights to people like me.

I would eventually learn that 18 Southern Democrats filibustered the 1960 and 1964 Civil Rights Acts to prevent votes from taking place.

On the other side of the aisle, Presidential candidate Barry Goldwater was the only GOP senator [to oppose](#) the 1964 Civil Rights Act for reasons best explained in his 1960 book, [The Conscience of a Conservative](#).

An article in [The New Yorker](#) stated: "Goldwater was not a segregationist, nor was he any kind of racist. He was, in fact, a lifelong opponent of racial discrimination...he was a member of the N.A.A.C.P. Goldwater voted against the Civil Rights Act because he believed, as a conservative, that the federal government did not have the power to

compel states to conform to its idea of racial equality, or to dictate to individuals whom they must associate with.”

Voters in Virginia were uncomfortable with the Byrd Machine and its massive resistance to racial integration, which is why Virginia voters elected its first Republican governor, [Linwood Holton](#), in 1969.

During a time when desegregation was still a big issue in the state, Holton enrolled his children in a predominantly black Richmond public school. He also opened employment opportunities to blacks and was very much committed to civil rights.

When Holton left office, however, he was replaced by [Mills Godwin](#), a former Democratic segregationist who in office first as a Democrat and later as a moderate Republican. When Godwin ran as a Republican, he had the support of the NAACP and the AFL-CIO. Over the years, Virginia has elected both Democrat and Republican governors, and in 1990 it elected Douglas Wilder, a Democrat, its first black governor.

How I Believe Most African Americans in the South Became Democrats

John F. Kennedy was elected president while I was in the first grade. Like other Americans, I was attracted to the youthfulness and glamour of the Kennedy family and what they symbolized. We closely watched First Lady Jackie Kennedy and her young children, and, somehow, I identified with them even though we had nothing in common other than the fact we were Americans. I believed and always understood that I lived in the greatest nation in the world. I would later develop a crush on Bobby Kennedy. I found myself fascinated by Bobby's 1968 presidential bid.

After JFK's 1963 assassination, former Texas senator and JFK's vice president, Lyndon B. Johnson, another Democrat (of course), became president.

Johnson supported and signed four major Civil Rights Acts during my youth: the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Immigration Nationality Act of 1965[i], and the Fair Housing Act of 1968:

Democrats claim the mantle of the party of civil rights because President Lyndon B. Johnson, championed and signed powerful legislation that ended legal discrimination in America. For most people, it does not matter if the actions were opportunistic or that in his personal life he was known to refer to blacks by the “N” word..

Clearly, Johnson helped position the Democrat Party in the South to win the loyalty of millions of blacks.

That helps explain why the overwhelming percentage of blacks in the nation are Democrats.

Chapter 3



College, Academia, and Why My Fellow Democrats Turned Against Me

I started attending Virginia Western community college in 1976, and, if I remember right, I voted for the first time in the 1980 presidential election. My days as an activist came a few years later while I was a graduate student studying political science at the University of North Carolina. During this time, I volunteered for Democrat David Price's congressional campaign and also supported Jesse Jackson for president in 1984.

Given everything happening around me, it was easy to be a Democrat.

I was proud of the fact that [Shirley Chisolm](#), a black Democrat, had in 1972 become the first black candidate to run for president. I was also proud and very much aware and pleased with the [formation of the Congressional Black Caucus](#) (CBC) in 1971 with its motto: "Black people have no permanent friends, no permanent enemies...just permanent interests."

However, we now know that the CBC always functioned as a Democrat caucus only. At that time of the CBC's formation, the only Republican in Congress was [Senator Edward Brooke](#) from Massachusetts.

While in college studying politics, history, and law, I read books and articles that further persuaded me that my allegiance to the Democrats was right and sound. I bought hook, line and sinker into the myth known as the Southern Strategy, whereby the two parties switched places in the 1960s.

That's when perceptions got twisted to the point where Democrats became the party of civil rights and the Republicans were tagged as the party of racism.

The rightness of my misled beliefs was reinforced by news articles highlighting racist statements or acts of individual Republicans. It was the birth of a double standard that continues today, in which the media work overtime to ensure that foolish statements by Republicans get prominent coverage, while equally racist statements by Democrats are downplayed or suppressed.

The political science literature also advanced this narrative. Without an ounce of cynicism, I accepted the books and articles written by scholars, like me, who were 'enlightened' Democrats.

Intellectually, I knew the histories of the two parties. I knew how the Republican Party, which had been the party of Lincoln, had fought for anti-lynching laws and integration. I also knew that the [first 22 black members of Congress, up until 1935, had all been Republicans, as was the first black U.S. senator.](#)

While I was in graduate school, the political mantra most commonly heard among Democrats was that only blacks could represent blacks and that once blacks claimed the remaining black majority districts represented by whites, black representation would stagnate since no further growth in representation would be possible. I wondered if that was really true that only blacks could represent blacks and I wondered what was different about the black candidates who managed to win white support.

I eventually designed a study to test the proposition. At the time, Lindy Boggs in Louisiana and Peter Rodino in New Jersey represented majority-black constituencies. I designed a study funded by the National Science Foundation that involved traveling around the nation visiting numerous congressional district selected based on the race of the representative and the racial composition of the district.

My research took me across the country visiting black representatives of majority-white districts, black representatives of majority-black districts, as well as white representatives of majority-black and majority-minority districts. I wanted to know how well Congress represented black interests and whether it was true that only blacks could represent black interests.

What started as a Ph.D. dissertation eventually grew into my prize-winning book, [Black Faces, Black Interests: The Representation of Blacks In Congress.](#)

Although I was a Democrat, people started calling me conservative and a race traitor because the conclusion did not fit the agenda of the left.

Black Faces was controversial because I discovered that political party was more important than the race of the representative. In the book, I pointed out the tradeoffs between maximizing black descriptive representation (having people in office who look like you) over substantive representation (having people who vote for the things you consider important).

It was clear at the time if blacks and their supporters continued to insist on the creation of majority-black congressional districts that siphoned off black voters from the districts of white Democrats, it would lead to more Republican victories jeopardizing the control of the U.S. House of Representatives. My book concluded that political party was more important than the race of the representative. I found that white representatives of black districts were doing a good job of representing their black constituents, and sometimes they did a better job than black representatives. The white representatives of black districts had to work harder to deliver on promises.

I was in the forefront of making the case that whites would support qualified black candidates and that many of the losses occurred because black candidates are more liberal than most whites, making it harder for them to win statewide and in majority-white geographical areas.

We see the same pattern played out in the 2018 losses of gubernatorial candidates Andrew Gillums in Florida and Stacey Abrams in Georgia. Studying the voting behavior of Democrats and Republicans caused me to view the parties in a different light. I begin to see the ineffectiveness of the Congressional Black Caucus and their ability to effectively lead on issues of relevance to the constituencies they purport to represent.

Life as a Political Science Professor

Later in life, as a political scientist professor, I was bothered that blacks were giving more than 95 percent of their vote to Democrats. As a matter of strategy, I strongly believed that blacks would never be able to get their issues addressed if their vote was not competitive between the two political parties. That is, if 95 percent of blacks are always going to vote Democrat, why should a Republican candidate for any political office care about issues important to blacks?

It was clear that blacks occupied a position of powerlessness (even if they didn't know it), where their votes were taken for granted. This is one of the means by which Rev. Jesse Jackson, Sr. and Al Sharpton amassed considerable wealth as the go-betweens and negotiators on behalf of the black masses.

Very little of that largesse trickled down to the masses.

As I see it, a competitive vote maximized the probability of having people in power who understood the challenges and conditions affecting most blacks.

Consequently, I always encouraged black students to be open to both political parties, even though it took me many decades to make the switch in my own party identification. Like most blacks, I bought into the Democrat-perpetuated narrative that Republicans are racists who hate black people and spend an inordinate amount of time strategizing ways to suppress the black vote.

In fact, until the Voting Rights Act was last extended for fifth time in 2006, rumors would regularly surface in the black community of Republicans' plans to strip them of their voting rights. These rumors and the claims of voter suppressions based on identification requirements are often intended to strike fear and spur a higher voter turnout.

Two main factors kept me in the Democratic Party. One was the fear of ostracism if I left the Democrats to become a Republican. Then there was my mistaken belief that the Republican Party was the party of racism while the Democrats were the party of civil rights.

The Southern Strategy

This brings us back to the Southern Strategy belief that the two parties flip-flopped, as mentioned earlier—with Republicans at the national level accused of going after the white racist vote in the South. Not with any overt racism, but by appealing to conservative principles on issues such as taxes, law and order, and traditional values.

The most damning evidence cited to support the purposely deceitful Southern Strategy view was a statement made by Lee Atwater, a South Carolinian, considered a brilliant strategist for the Republican Party. Speaking off the record in a 1981 interview with political scientist Alexandra Lamis, [Atwater famously](#) said:

"Y'all don't quote me on this. You start out in 1954 by saying, 'N****, n****, n****.' By 1968 you can't say 'n****'—that hurts you. Backfires. So you say stuff like forced busing, [states rights](#) and all that stuff. You're getting so abstract now [that] you're talking about cutting taxes, and all these things you're talking about are totally economic things and a byproduct of them is [that] blacks get hurt worse than whites. And subconsciously maybe that is part of it. I'm not saying that. But I'm saying that if it is getting that abstract, and that coded, that we are doing away with the racial problem one way or the other. You follow me—because obviously sitting around saying, 'We want to cut this,' is much more abstract than even the busing thing, and a hell of a lot more abstract than 'N****, n****.'"

Many scholars have bought into the Southern Strategy because of the books and articles written to advance this theory. A critical analysis of the actions of Republican

leaders and the context of the times would suggest that more was going on. In Virginia, as I have written, the state rejected the racist Byrd machine and elected its first Republican governor in 1969. After Holton served his term, his successor Godwin Mills, once a segregationist, ran on a non-racial platform with support from the NAACP and unions.

In fact, Professors Richard Johnston and Byron Shafer, writing in their 2009 book [The End of Southern Exceptionalism](#), used recent surveys and election data to show that it was economic growth, not race, that explains how the post-Civil War South was transformed. As early as the 1950s, high-income voters gave majority support to Republican presidential candidates, whereas lower-income whites supported Democrats—and continued to do so until the 1990s.

The Democrats have done an amazing job of covering their tracks but things have begun to change. Millions of Americans are learning the truth about the histories of the two political parties. Filmmaker and documentarian Dinesh D'Souza has done a superb job of educating Americans about the histories of the two political parties. In 2016, I had a major role in his film, ['Hillarys America: The Secret History of the Democratic Party](#). The following year I recorded four [Prager University videos](#) that include: [The Inconvenient Truth About the Democratic Party](#), [The Inconvenient Truth About the Republican Party](#), and [Why the Democratic South Became Republican](#). These videos have reached a combined total of over 40 million people. This has resulted in quite a bit of angst among academicians who have a political and intellectual stake in the theory of the big switch better known as the Southern Strategy.



Chapter 4



Disillusionment and Freedom

Leaving one's political party can be as painful as a divorce, especially if you have been there all your life. For me, being a Democrat was as natural as breathing. In fact, I spent almost two-thirds of my adult life in the party into which I had been born. Like others around me, I believed the Republicans were the party of the rich and the Democrats the party of the working-class. My party affiliation was a no-brainer.

My growth in my Christian faith was the main catalyst for me to change party affiliation, and it was a growth that accelerated in 1999, leading me to question and reexamine everything I had believed about the world. Initially, I was not ready to become a Republican even though I shared most of the values and principles espoused by their leaders. Again, it was the influence of the news media and the books and articles I had read over the years that was holding me back. Initially, I stayed with the Democrats, and I suffered with [cognitive dissonance](#), the condition of holding views and perspectives different from my actions and behaviors.

In that time I became an independent and stood in the middle throwing rocks at

each side, while regularly voting Republican.

That ended in 2009, when I began to speak out against the programs and policies of President Barack Obama, a man I did not vote for in 2008.

His words never matched his actions, either before or after he became president. I had finally made the life-altering decision to become a Republican. This was also after President George W. Bush had appointed me, in 2008, to two political positions as an Independent; one where I served on the National Endowment of the Humanities and the other on the Tennessee Advisory Committee to the U.S. Civil Rights Commission.

One of the most difficult acts I had to undertake as a Republican was to go into a predominantly black precinct and request the Republican ballot for the primary. It seemed all eyes were fixated on me. It was kind of like the E.F. Hutton commercial where everyone in the room stops to listen. I am firmly convinced that Republicans need to create support groups for Democrats casting their first Republican primary vote. I have heard stories of people who had precinct workers try to steer them toward the “proper” ballot. This has even happened to whites in NYC.

As a Christian, I saw stark contradictions between my biblical worldview and the Democratic Party's position on the issues I care about most deeply. Eventually, it became clear to me that my Christian faith dictated that I align myself with the party offering the strongest defense of the constitutional rights of the unborn, the perpetuation of marriage between a man and a woman, religious liberty and freedom of conscience, and support and defense of Israel.

The Republican Party's historical commitment to civil rights, free market capitalism, limited government, and individual liberty factored into my decision-making. I was also moved by the charitable works of conservative Republicans that I saw working with inner-city youth and missions. These people were pouring themselves into the lives of the poor and disenfranchised; they were picking up where the government had left off when it came to helping refugees and immigrants. It was party and faith in action that prompted admirable actions of a civic nature.

Judeo-Christian values and principles underlie the work of many Republicans. This is exemplified in the words and deeds of Vice President Mike Pence and other high-ranking officials who operate from a sense of purpose and destiny. We will not easily find such examples among today's Democrats.

There is much at stake. I have great concern about the Democratic Party's distorted vision for America and its unethical alliance with the mainstream media. It's a partnership that enables leftist politicians to use non-stop attacks and criticisms of

President Trump to deceive voters about the president and those of us who have aligned with the Republican Party.

High-ranking Democrats have encouraged their constituents to confront and harass Republicans, while the latter go about their daily business. This is dangerous and un-American. We know it will not end well.

Today's Democratic Party is not the same Democratic Party of my youth and early adulthood. It is much worse in all dimensions. There are fewer Christians, not to mention fewer people in general, willing to stand for traditional values and for constitutional values and principles. We saw much of this played out dramatically during the 2018 U.S. Supreme Court confirmation hearings for Brett Kavanaugh, when Democrat leaders argued against due process and the presumption of innocence for persons accused of crimes.

It is a party in decline that has allowed itself to be overrun and taken over by its most radical elements. The new Democrats show a disdain for America and its people. They are not ashamed of using migrants and the suffering of minority populations to advance their agenda. Its leaders argue against due process rights, the presumption of innocence, and the rule of law. Equally frightening is their concerted efforts to bring socialized medicine to America by changing the intent and purpose of the Medicare program.

Socialism has failed everywhere it has been tried. Republicans know this. We should run and not just walk away from the Democrats.

About Dr. Carol Swain

From high school dropout to teenage wife and mother to highly accomplished university professor and public intellectual, [Dr. Carol Swain](#) is passionate about empowering others to confidently raise their voices in the public square.

She is an author, a public speaker, a newspaper columnist for The Epoch Times, a political commentator, and the host of the Be the People Podcast heard on the America Out Loud Talk Radio Network, as well as [Two Minutes to Think About it](#) on Bott Radio.



Dr. Swain is also an award-winning political scientist, a former professor of political science and professor of law at Vanderbilt University, and a member of the James Madison Society, an international community of scholars affiliated with the James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions at Princeton University. Before joining Vanderbilt, she was a tenured associate professor of politics and public policy at Princeton.

Dr. Swain lives in Tennessee and has served on the Tennessee Advisory Committee to the U.S. Civil Rights Commission and the National Endowment for the Humanities. She received a B.A. from Roanoke College, M.A. from Virginia Polytechnic & State University, Ph.D. from University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and M.S.L. from Yale.