

PART ONE

*Old  
Democrats*



## CHAPTER ONE

Old Democrats and  
the Shock of  
the New*Ruy Teixeira*

WHO ARE THE Old Democrats? A better question is: Who *were* the Old Democrats? If we are to understand those labeled Old Democrats today (Ted Kennedy, Dick Gephardt) and the role they and their ideas have played in the evolution of the Democratic Party, we need to go back several decades to the era when Old Democrats worthy of the name still roamed the earth.

**Old Democrats**

Old Democrats were New Deal Democrats. Their worldview was based on a combination of the Democratic Party's historic populist commitment to the average working American and their own experience in battling the Great Depression (and building their political coalition) through increased government spending and the regulation and promotion of labor unions. It was really a rather simple philosophy, even if its application was complex: Government should help the average person through government spending. Capitalism needs regulation to work properly. Labor unions are good. Putting money in the average person's pocket is more important than rarified worries

about the quality of life. Traditional morality is to be respected not challenged. Racism and the like are bad, but not so bad that the party should depart from its main mission of material uplift for the average American.

The Old Democrat worldview, which had deep roots in an economy dominated by mass-production industries, was politically based among the workers, who were overwhelmingly white. Their dominance among these voters was, in turn, the key to their political success. To be sure, there were important divisions among these voters—by country of origin (German, Scandinavian, Eastern European, English, Irish, Italian, etc.), by religion (Protestants vs. Catholics), and by region (South vs. non-South)—that greatly complicated the politics of this group, but the Old Democrats mastered these complications and maintained a deep base among these voters.

Of course, the New Deal Coalition, as originally forged, included most blacks and was certainly cross-class, especially among groups like Jews and Southerners. But the prototypical member of the coalition was an ethnic white worker—commonly seen as those working in a unionized factory but also including those who weren't in unions or who toiled in other blue-collar settings (construction, transportation, etc.). It was these voters who provided the numbers for four Franklin Roosevelt election victories, as well as Harry Truman's narrow victory in 1948,<sup>1</sup> and who provided political support for the emerging U.S. welfare state, with its implicit social contract and greatly expanded role for government.

Even in the 1950s, with Republican Dwight Eisenhower as president, the white working class continued to put Democrats in Congress and to support the expansion of the welfare state, as a roaring U.S. economy delivered the goods and government poured money

1. Ruy Teixeira and Joel Rogers, *America's Forgotten Majority: Why the White Working Class Still Matters* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 5.

into roads, science, schools, and whatever else seemed necessary to build up the country. This era, stretching back to the late 1940s and forward to the mid-1960s, was the era that created the first mass middle class in the world—a middle class that even factory workers could enter because they could earn relatively comfortable livings without high levels of education or professional skills. A middle class, in other words, that members of the white working class could reasonably aspire to and frequently attain.

So, Old Democrats depended on the white working class for political support and the white working class depended on the Democrats to run government and the economy in a way that kept the upward escalator to the middle class moving. Social and cultural issues were not particularly important to this mutually beneficial relationship; indeed, these issues had only a peripheral role in the uncomplicated progressivism that animated the Democratic Party of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. But that arrangement, and that uncomplicated progressivism, could not survive the decline of mass-production industries and the rise of postindustrial capitalism.

First, there was the transformation of the white working class itself. In 1948, about two-thirds of the workforce was white men, and the bulk of these white men worked at blue-collar manufacturing and construction jobs or at blue-collar service jobs, such as janitor or warehouseman. These men were also heavily unionized, especially in certain areas of the country: by the late 1940s, unions claimed around 60 percent or more of the Northern blue-collar workforce.<sup>2</sup> But the past half century has changed all that. The white working class has become much more diverse—today, there are almost as many women workers as men—even as unionization has declined. Only a relatively small proportion (17 percent) of the white working class works in

2. All data in this paragraph come from John B. Judis and Ruy Teixeira, *The Emerging Democratic Majority* (New York: Scribner, 2002), 62–65.

manufacturing (even among men, the proportion is still less than 25 percent). In fact, the entire goods-producing sector, which includes construction, mining, and agriculture, as well as manufacturing, only covers 30 percent of the white working class. This leaves the overwhelming majority—seven in ten—in the service sector, including government. There are almost as many members of the new white working class in trade alone (especially retail) as there are in all goods-producing jobs.<sup>3</sup>

Second, as this great transformation was changing the character of the white working class, reducing the size and influence of the Democrats' traditional blue-collar constituencies, the evolution of postindustrial capitalism was creating new constituencies and movements with new demands. These new constituencies and movements wanted more out of the welfare state than steady economic growth, copious infrastructure spending, and the opportunity to raise a family in the traditional manner.

During the 1960s, these new demands on the welfare state came to a head. Americans' concern about their quality of life overflowed from the two-car garage to clean air and water and safe automobiles, from higher wages to government-guaranteed health care in old age, and from job access to equal opportunities for men and women and blacks and whites. Out of these concerns came the environmental, consumer, civil rights, and feminist movements. As Americans abandoned the older ideal of self-denial and the taboos that accompanied it, they embraced a libertarian ethic of personal life. Women asserted their sexual independence through the use of birth control pills and through exercising the right to have an abortion. Adolescents experimented with sex and courtship. Homosexuals "came out" and openly congregated in bars and neighborhoods.

Of these changes, the one with the most far-reaching political

3. All data in this paragraph came from Teixeira and Rogers, *America's Forgotten Majority*, 17.

effects was the civil rights movement and its demands for equality and economic progress for black America. Democrats, because of both their traditional, if usually downplayed, antiracist ideology and their political relationship to the black community, had no choice but to respond to those demands. The result was a great victory for social justice, but one that created huge political difficulties for the Democrats among their white working-class supporters. Kevin Phillips captured these developments:

The principal force which broke up the Democratic (New Deal) coalition is the Negro socioeconomic revolution and liberal Democratic ideological inability to cope with it. Democratic "Great Society" programs aligned that party with many Negro demands, but the party was unable to defuse the racial tension sundering the nation. The South, the West, and the Catholic sidewalks of New York were the focus points of conservative opposition to the welfare liberalism of the federal government; however, the general opposition . . . came in large part from prospering Democrats who objected to Washington dissipating their tax dollars on programs which did them no good. The Democratic party fell victim to the ideological impetus of a liberalism which had carried it beyond programs taxing the few for the benefit of the many . . . to programs taxing the many on behalf of the few.<sup>4</sup>

However, if race was the chief vehicle by which the New Deal coalition was torn apart, it was by no means the only one. White working-class voters also reacted poorly to the extremes with which the rest of the new social movements became identified. Feminism became identified with bra-burners, lesbians, and hostility to the nuclear family; the antiwar movement, with appeasement of the Third World radicals and the Soviet Union; the environmental movement, with a Luddite opposition to economic growth; and the move toward

4. Kevin Phillips, *The Emerging Republican Majority* (New York: Arlington House, 1969).

more personal freedom, with a complete abdication of personal responsibility.

Thus, the Old Democrat mainstream that dominated the party was confronted with a challenge. The uncomplicated New Deal commitments to government spending, economic regulation, and labor unions that had defined Democratic progressivism for more than thirty years suddenly provided little guidance for dealing with an explosion of potential new constituencies for the party. The demands of the new constituencies for equality and for a better, as opposed to merely a richer, life were starting to redefine what progressivism meant, and the Democrats had to struggle to catch up.

### New Old Democrats

Initially, Old Democrat politicians responded to these changes in the fashion of politicians since time immemorial: they sought to co-opt these new movements by absorbing many of their demands while holding onto the party's basic ideology and style of governing. Thus were born the *New* Old Democrats.

New Old Democrats didn't change their fundamental commitment to the New Deal welfare state; instead, they grafted onto it support for all the various new constituencies and their key demands. After Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act in 1964, the party moved, during the next eight years, to give the women's, antiwar, consumers', and environmental movements prominent places within the party. This move reflected both the politician's standard interest in capturing the votes of new constituencies *and* the ongoing expansion of the definition of what it meant to be a Democrat, particularly a progressive one.

There was no guarantee, of course, that gains among these new constituencies wouldn't be more than counterbalanced by losses among their old constituency—the white working class—who had precious little interest in this expansion of what it meant to be a



progressive and a Democrat. Indeed, in 1972, that turned out to be the case with the nomination and disastrous defeat of George McGovern—an enthusiastic New Old Democrat. McGovern's commitment to the traditional Democratic welfare state was unmistakable, but so was his commitment to all the various social movements and constituencies that were reshaping the party, the demands of which were enshrined in his campaign platform. That made it easy for Richard Nixon's campaign to typecast McGovern as the candidate of "acid, amnesty, and abortion." The white working class reacted accordingly and gave Nixon overwhelming support at the polls, casting 70 percent of their votes for the Republican candidate.<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, just how far the Democratic Party fell in the eyes of the white working class during that time can be seen by comparing the average white working-class vote for the Democrats in 1960–1964 (55 percent) with their average vote for the Democrats in 1968–1972 (35 percent).<sup>6</sup> That's a drop of 20 points, from over half to just over one-third. The Democrats were the party of the white working class no longer.

With the sharp economic recession and Nixon scandals of 1973–1974, the Democrats were able to develop enough political momentum to retake the White House in 1976, with Jimmy Carter's narrow defeat of Gerald Ford. But their political revival did not last long. Not only did the Carter administration fail to do much to defuse white working class hostility to the new social movements, especially to the black liberation movement, but also economic events—the stagflation of the late 1970s—conspired to make that hostility even sharper. Though stagflation (inflation and unemployment combined with slow economic growth) first appeared during the 1973–1975 recession, it persisted during the Carter administration and was peaking on the eve of the 1980 election. As the economy slid once more

5. Teixeira and Rogers, *America's Forgotten Majority*, 6.

6. *Ibid.*, 32.

into recession, the inflation rate in that year was 12.5 percent. Combined with an unemployment rate of 7.1 percent, it produced a “miserery index” of nearly 20 percent.

The stagflation fed resentments about race—about high taxes for welfare (which were assumed to go primarily to minorities) and about affirmative action. It also sowed doubts about Democrats’ ability to manage the economy and made Republican and business explanations of stagflation—blaming it on government regulation, high taxes, and spending—more plausible. In 1978, the white backlash and doubts about Democratic economic policies helped fuel a nationwide tax revolt. In 1980, these factors reproduced the massive exodus of white working-class voters from the Democratic tickets first seen in 1968 and 1972. In the 1980 and 1984 elections, Reagan averaged 61 percent support among the white working class, compared with an average of 35 percent support for his Democratic opponents, Jimmy Carter and Walter Mondale.<sup>7</sup>

### New Democrats

New Old Democrats appeared powerless to stop this juggernaut, saddled as they were with a double-barreled progressivism that increasingly seemed like a dual liability. On the one hand, they were committed to a model of the welfare state economy that no longer worked, and on the other, they were tied to a set of constituency groups whose priorities seemed alien to middle America. When their preferred candidate, Walter Mondale, got blown away in the 1984 election, losing every state but Minnesota and the District of Columbia, some Democrats decided enough was enough and organized a group to shed these electoral liabilities and reform the party.

The group was the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), founded in 1985, and it directly counterposed its “New Democrat”

7. Ibid.

approach to that of Mondale and the New Old Democrats who dominated the party. In a memo to prospective DLC members, Al Fromm, cofounder of the group along with Will Marshall, expressed his concern about the Democrats' decline, which he blamed on the "consistent pursuit of wrongheaded, losing strategies." Fromm was particularly critical of Mondale's strategy of "making blatant appeals to liberal and minority interest groups in the hopes of building a winning coalition where a majority, under normal circumstances, simply does not exist." Fromm also worried that with union membership declining, the Democrats "are more and more viewed as the party of 'big labor,'" and that with liberalism in disrepute, Democrats are "increasingly viewed as the 'liberal' party." Fromm was most at home with Southern Democrats like Sam Nunn, Chuck Robb, and Russell Long. Although he supported social security and other basic New Deal reforms, was concerned about poverty, and was committed to civil rights, he parted company with New Old Democrats by being strongly sympathetic to business's view of its own problems, hostile or indifferent to labor unions, and opposed to any ambitious new government social programs.<sup>8</sup>

After Michael Dukakis's defeat in 1988, Fromm, Marshall, and the DLC decided to develop a philosophy and a platform for the Democratic Party that would redefine what it meant to be a progressive. With money raised primarily by Wall Street Democrats, the DLC set up the Progressive Policy Institute (PPI), with Marshall at the helm, and hired policy experts to draft papers and proposals. The most important of these was a 1989 paper entitled "The Politics of Evasion," written by William Galston, Mondale's former issues director, and PPI fellow Elaine Kamarck, who would later become Gore's policy adviser in the first Clinton administration. Galston and Kamarck argued that in the late 1960s, the liberalism of the New Deal had degenerated into a "liberal fundamentalism," which

8. Judis and Teixeira, *The Emerging Democratic Majority*, 127.

the public has come to associate with tax and spending policies that contradict the interests of average families; with welfare policies that foster dependence rather than self-reliance; with softness toward the perpetrators of crime and indifference toward its victims; with ambivalence toward the assertion of American values and interests abroad; and with an adversarial stance toward mainstream moral and cultural values.<sup>9</sup>

Galston, Kamarck, and the DLC advocated fiscal conservatism, welfare reform, increased spending on crime through the development of a police corps, tougher mandatory sentences, support for capital punishment, and policies that encouraged traditional families. Another PPI fellow, David Osborne, developed a strategy for “re-inventing government” by contracting out services while retaining control over how they were performed. In Osborne’s formulation, government should “steer, not row.”

As can readily be seen, the DLC New Democrats were challenging the double-barreled progressivism of the New Old Democrats across the board, from their backing of new constituency groups and those groups’ policy positions to their attachment to New Deal–style social spending and regulation. They were also arguing that only their strategy could be effective in winning back the white working class—the New Old Democrats’ original constituency.

Beyond their claims about reaching the white working class, the DLC and PPI strategists didn’t really detail the constituencies they were trying to reach. One can infer from their writings that they were targeting middle-class, white-collar suburbanites, but there was little specific guidance beyond that as to where Democrats should seek votes among this very broad group. They also didn’t talk about how a majority would appear on a map; instead, their focus seemed to be primarily on winning the Midwest and the South for Democrats. The DLC was skeptical about California being the anchor of a new major-

9. William Galston and Elaine Kamarck, “The Politics of Evasion: Democrats and the Presidency,” Progressive Policy Institute, September 1989.

ity—Galston and Kamarck derided this idea as “the California dream.” The DLC also didn’t put stock in the power of the women’s vote to deliver a new majority: Galston and Kamarck wrote that “the gender gap that has opened up in the past twelve years is not the product of a surge of Democratic support among women, but rather the erosion of Democratic support among men.” The DLC’s 1990 platform didn’t even explicitly support abortion rights.

In other words, the DLC understood neither the special role that professionals, women, and minorities would play in the new Democratic majority nor the central role that California and the Northwest would play. The role of these groups only became clear in the next decade, as Bill Clinton adapted the New Democrat formula to electoral realities and, in the process, created a synthesis between the politics of the New Democrats and the politics of the New Old Democrats who still dominated large sectors of the party.

### The Clinton Synthesis

It is simplistic to think of Bill Clinton as purely a New Democrat. The reality is considerably more complicated. Indeed, although his debt to the New Democrats and the DLC is large and obvious, he is also responsible for taking the views of the New Old Democrats—both the New (social movements) and the Old (New Deal)—and making them part of an electorally effective politics. In other words, while his success in the 1990s marked the ascendance of New Democrat politics, it also consolidated the influence on the party of the new social movements *and* preserved the influence of moderate New Deal populism and activism on the party’s program. It helped turn what had been shaping up as a war between two different versions of progressivism into a synthesis that all elements of the party could accept, however grudgingly.

Consider how Clinton ran his first successful campaign for president. It is true that he espoused a number of New Democrat themes

from the very beginning of his campaign. To inoculate himself against Republican attacks, he championed welfare reform, spending on police and public safety, and capital punishment. He spoke of a “new covenant” between the people and the government—“a solemn agreement between the people and their government, based not simply on what each of us can take, but what all of us must give to our nation.” But as the heir of a Southern-Southwestern populism, which had included Democratic politicians like Lyndon Johnson, Albert Gore Sr., Dale Bumpers, and Oklahoman Fred Harris, and as a product of the antiestablishment student movements of the 1960s, Clinton did not hesitate to emphasize his populist streak when it became necessary to defeat neoliberal Paul Tsongas, whose views on economics paralleled those of the DLC. Like Mondale against Hart in 1984, Clinton ran as a champion of the New Deal. He charged Tsongas with a lack of faith in Social Security; he promised a large middle-class tax cut, massive public investments, and national health insurance. He avidly courted unions, blacks, and senior citizens. And, in the end, he prevailed against Tsongas.

In the general election campaign, he tacked back to the center. He still trumpeted his support for women’s rights and for the environment, and with the country mired in recession, he continued to promise ambitious new programs, as epitomized by his populist-style platform statement, “Putting People First.” But Clinton also emphasized his support for reducing government bureaucracy and for “ending welfare as we know it.” In the end, Clinton’s campaign—and his election victory—reflected a synthesis of New Democrat and New Old Democrat themes, not simply an application of the DLC’s strategic insights, as that organization’s mythology presents it.

This synthesis was also on full display in Clinton’s successful 1996 campaign. Clinton, the populist reinforced by an AFL-CIO that had been reinvigorated politically under its new president John Sweeney, flayed the Republicans for cutting Medicare to pay for a tax cut to the wealthy. Clinton, the former DLC chairman, boasted of reform-

ing welfare and advanced incremental, not “big government,” reforms to make higher education affordable, put computers in classrooms, and provide child care and increased access to health care. Clinton, a child of the 1960s, campaigned earnestly for civil rights, women’s rights, and the protection of the environment. And Clinton, the tribune of postindustrial America, promised to “build a bridge to the twenty-first century.”

The election results showed the electoral promise of Clinton’s new synthesis. He carried women by 16 points (including white women by 5 points), professionals by 17 points, and even white working-class voters by 1 point.<sup>10</sup> He totally dominated the minority vote, receiving 76 percent support, and easily carried the new Democratic bastion of California (by 13 points), as well as the rest of the Pacific Northwest. He also carried key Midwestern swing states, such as Ohio and Missouri; much of the Southwest (New Mexico, Arizona, and Nevada); and four Southern states, including Florida.

The latter part of Clinton’s second term, of course, was heavily colored by the Monica Lewinsky sex scandal and Clinton’s subsequent impeachment. And unfortunately for the Democrats, with that scandal and its cultural implications as a background, Al Gore was hardly the ideal candidate to rise to the challenge of making the Clinton synthesis work in the 2000 election.

But this wasn’t because the synthesis was alien to Gore’s background and viewpoint. He was certainly a New Democrat. He had been a founding member of the DLC and the choice of some of its leaders for president in 1988.

In addition, as a student at Harvard, Gore had become familiar with, and participated in, the social movements of the 1960s, particularly the environmental movement, for which he later wrote a book, *Earth in the Balance*. He had also inherited his father’s populist con-

10. Author’s analysis of 1996 National Election Study and 1996 Voter News Service Exit Poll data.

victions. So, like Clinton, Gore had different sides and faces, but in public he could exhibit them only over time and, in contrast to Clinton, in a manner that made his audience question whether they were seeing the real Al Gore or a campaign contrivance. This turned out to hurt in an election where the problems of trust and being perceived as culturally elitist loomed large due to the Clinton scandals.

Consistent with his tin ear for the synthesis, Gore lurched every few months of his presidential campaign from one face and strategy to another. First, under the tutelage of Mark Penn, the DLC's pollster, Gore tried aiming his message at "wired workers" (workers who "frequently use computers that are part of a network and work together in teams"), who were allegedly concerned about the threat of "suburban sprawl" to a better "quality of life." That strategy didn't work (in October 1999, Gore trailed Bush by 19 percent in one opinion poll and had lost his lead to his Democratic challenger, former Senator Bill Bradley, in Iowa and New Hampshire), so he fired Penn and brought on a group of more conventionally liberal consultants.

Gore next adopted the same strategy against Bradley that Mondale had used against Hart and that Clinton had used against Tsongas. He defended Democratic orthodoxy and the party's most loyal constituencies. With the resulting solid support from union members and blacks, he easily defeated Bradley for the nomination. But having vanquished Bradley, Gore found himself once more trailing Bush. So, like Mondale and Clinton before him, Gore's initial reaction was to grasp for the center, emphasizing issues like fiscal responsibility. This time, however, the trick didn't work. A month passed, and Gore was still consistently trailing Bush, with a double-digit deficit in many opinion polls.

So Gore brought in yet another consultant, Stanley Greenberg, Clinton's pollster in 1992. Greenberg advised Gore to use his biography, particularly his service in Vietnam, to counteract voters' identification of him with the Clinton scandals, to steer clear of Clinton



himself, and to underplay his support for issues like gun control and abortion that could alienate working-class voters. Greenberg also recommended that Gore resume the populist rhetoric of the primary campaign, but without committing himself to any large government programs. Gore's convention speech did exactly this. He said of the Republicans, "They're for the powerful, and we're for the people." After the convention speech, Gore suddenly sped past Bush in the opinion polls and remained ahead for a month until the fateful debates, when his personal limitations as a candidate shone through. In the end, of course, he lost, albeit by a very, very narrow (and contested) electoral vote margin (271–267).

As this recounting suggests, Gore was a poor bearer indeed of the Clinton synthesis and never could figure out a way to make that synthesis come alive for voters. Instead, he tended to harp on one aspect or another of the synthesis to the exclusion of others. Voters found these shifting personae unattractive, and that image dovetailed all too well with a cultural distrust of the national Democratic Party that had been exacerbated by the Clinton scandals. All of this was enough to cost Gore an extremely close election.

### Newer Democrats

Gore did win the popular vote (48.4 to 47.9 percent), however, and the 267 electoral votes he received represented states that Clinton had also carried twice. All of those states, which included California (by an easy 12-point margin, despite having done little campaigning there), Oregon and Washington in the Pacific Northwest, New Mexico in the Southwest, Illinois and New Jersey (carried by the Republicans in every presidential election between 1968 and 1988), and every New England state but New Hampshire, had now been carried by the Democrats three elections in a row. These states were the Democrats' new base and showed how the geographical strength of the Democratic coalition had shifted.

Gore's performance was also solid among the Democrats' emerging constituencies, indicating the consolidation of the constituencies within the Democratic Party. He received 75 percent of the minority vote (which was about a fifth of the vote in 2000 and will likely be a quarter by the end of the decade) and actually did better than Clinton among both blacks and Asians. He carried professionals by 7 points and women by 11 points. Moreover, he did particularly well among the subcategories of women that are growing the fastest: Single, working women—who have grown from 19 percent of the adult female population in 1970 to 29 percent today—backed Gore 67 to 29 percent. College-educated women—who have grown from just 8 percent of the 25-and-older female population to 24 percent today—backed Gore over Bush by 57 to 39 percent.<sup>11</sup> Gore also carried America's burgeoning postindustrial metropolitan areas, or "ideopolises" (where 44 percent of the nation's voters now live), by 55 to 41 percent. These technologically advanced areas, specializing in the production of ideas and services, are now as central to today's Democratic coalition as the manufacturing centers of the industrial economy were to the New Deal coalition.

Where Gore most severely underperformed relative to Clinton was among white working-class voters. He lost them by 17 points, whereas Clinton had carried them by 1 point in 1996. Gore's deficit included a walloping by 34 points among white working-class men.<sup>12</sup>

The recriminations for Gore's loss flew thick and fast after the election. Predictably, the DLC blamed his defeat on his failure to hew strictly to the New Democrat line. In so doing, they frequently sounded like they were simply replaying the tapes they'd made back in the 1980s when analyzing the Mondale and Dukakis defeats. It was as if the Democratic Party of 2001—after all the changes of the Clinton era—had somehow become the Democratic Party of 1989

11. All election data in this paragraph from author's analysis of 2000 National Election Study and 2000 Voter News Service Exit Poll data.

12. Author's analysis of 2000 Voter News Service Exit Poll data.

or even 1985, and the very same battles had to be reenacted, Groundhog Day–style.

“Gore chose a populist rather than a New Democrat message,” DLC leader Al Fromm wrote. “As a result, voters viewed him as too liberal and identified him as an advocate of big government. Those perceptions . . . hurt him with male voters in general and with key New Economy swing voters in particular. By emphasizing class warfare, he seemed to be talking to Industrial Age America, not Information Age America.” The legacy of the Clinton scandals or Gore’s particular failings as a candidate were nowhere to be found in this explanation.

It’s important to note that the liberal, or New Old Democrat, wing of the party did not take the mirror image stance of the New Democrats, which would have been to claim Gore lost because he wasn’t liberal enough. Instead, they generally backed the analysis of Gore’s pollster, Greenberg, who did an extensive postelection poll under the auspices of the liberal Campaign for America’s Future. Greenberg blamed Gore’s defeat primarily on the decline of the Democratic vote among white working-class voters (which was more consistent with data from the exit polls), particularly white working-class men. According to Greenberg, these voters backed Bush rather than Gore because they didn’t trust Gore—a sentiment traceable to the Clinton scandals—and because they rejected Gore’s stands in favor of gun control and abortion. They were not put off by Gore’s populism. On the contrary, it was a major reason that many of them backed him, despite their cultural distaste for Gore himself.<sup>13</sup>

Neither Greenberg nor party liberals, however, had much of an answer for how to advance the synthesis pioneered by Clinton in a closely divided country where conservative Republicans now held the levers of power. It was true that Democrats would be silly to abandon populism, just as it was true that cultural distrust among the white

13. See Judis and Teixeira, *The Emerging Democratic Majority*, 141–43.

working class was a real problem. But the DLC, in their ham-handed way, were right about where the party's future lay. It may not lie in their hobbyhorse of "wired workers," which is much too vague a designation, but it does lie in the new workforce of postindustrial America and in the fast-growing metropolitan areas where they live and work. This workforce responds not to the old-time religion of party liberals but rather to the new progressivism encapsulated by the Clinton synthesis. The key for Democrats, therefore, is to discover a strategy that makes this new progressivism palatable to a sufficient base of white working-class voters while building the support the party needs among college-educated professionals and others in America's burgeoning ideopolises. This latter aspect of the Democrats' task seemed to elude Greenberg and the New Old Democrats.

Given these huge explanatory gaps on both sides, most Democrats were understandably tepid about signing up on either side of the dispute. Both sides seemed more interested in rehearsing old debates and defending old positions than in grappling with the election that had just happened and building on the Clinton synthesis in all its complicated glory. There was simply no appetite among most Democrats for rerunning the faction disputes of the 1980s; Democrats knew their party had changed dramatically in the 1990s, and an argument that was detached from that reality seemed uninteresting at best and downright destructive at worst. Moreover, the Republican Party under Bush, with an ascendant hard Right and its willingness to say or do anything to win, seemed a formidable enemy that called for a fresh Democratic approach, not just old wine in new bottles. This has led to the emergence of what I call "Newer Democrats."

In the aftermath of the 2000 election, Newer Democrats saw the New Democrats and the New Old Democrats, the DLC and the liberals/populists, as continuing to provide important insights and useful tools for building the party. And both groups were clearly important parts of the party that were not going to go away. But neither New Democrats nor populists, in this emerging view, seemed

to know how to beat Bush and the no-holds-barred conservative Right that was taking over the Republican Party. Both groups seemed stuck in the past, even though the urgent task was to transform the actually existing Democratic Party, with its updated vision of progressivism and new coalition, into an instrument that could beat the Bush Republicans.

This new view was accentuated by the events of 2001–2004. Bush started his presidency acting like he'd won a landslide in a country that was thirsting for a radical antigovernment agenda. That willful misinterpretation of the public mood was turbocharged by September 11 and its aftermath, when Bush benefited from the largest and longest "rally effect" the U.S. presidency has ever seen. In effect, Bush took it as a license to ignore public opinion and pursue the agenda nearest and dearest to his heart, the hard-Right agenda of the base of the Republican Party: big tax cuts; containment or outright reduction of nondefense spending; heavily probusiness social and regulatory policy; dismantling of environmental protections; partial privatization of Social Security; appointment of conservative judges; banning the use of federal funds that involved the destruction of embryos for stem-cell research; and (after 9/11) an aggressive and, when necessary, go-it-alone foreign policy.

What did Democratic leaders do in response? That is where Newer Democrats found much to question in the conduct of both factions of the party. First, there was the massive tax cut of 2001, which Democrats of all stripes seemed powerless to stop, or even oppose, in a disciplined way. Then, of course, came September 11, when the oddly craven behavior of the Democrats became completely supine. Given the intensity of the rally effect for the president, a conciliatory approach by Democratic politicians was only to be expected. But in the view of many Democrats, that conciliatory approach went too far, especially because concessions on the Democratic side seemed never to be matched with concessions on the Republican side. For example, there was the early 2002 No Child

Left Behind education reform bill, which liberal Democrats like Ted Kennedy helped pass but then were stiffed on the bill's funding levels. Then there was the summer of corporate scandals in 2002, when congressional Democrats let Bush and the GOP off the hook with the easy-to-sign-onto Sarbanes-Oxley bill, effectively blunting the partisan edge of that issue. It seemed like the Democrats in Congress were getting rolled, again and again.

But what came after the summer of 2002 really fueled the ascendance of Newer Democrats. That summer saw a shift toward the Democrats in the polls, both nationally and in key state races. Not coincidentally, in the eyes of many Democrats, the Bush administration chose the end of the summer to launch a national debate on whether to go to war with Iraq. The Bush administration had decided earlier to attempt to oust Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, but the White House staged the congressional debate over the war during the height of the election rather than before or after it. Rather than remove the issue of war from political partisanship—as Bush's father had done in 1990 when he postponed the congressional debate on whether to forcefully oust Iraq from Kuwait until after the election—the second Bush White House sought to use the issue for political ends.

This tactic infuriated many Democrats, but the response of their own party infuriated them even more. The Democrats in Congress, guided by Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle, House Minority Leader Dick Gephardt, and Terry McAuliffe, the chairman of the Democratic National Committee, adopted a deeply flawed strategy to counter the Republicans. They chose to focus on prescription drugs and social security. These were important issues, but neither was the central domestic issue to voters. The central issue was the economy, but, incredibly, Democrats did not offer any economic program to combat the country's growing unemployment.

As for the Iraq war debate, many of the Democrats, led by Gephardt, adopted a strategy of simply accepting the administration's

case for war, with all its attendant omissions and exaggerations, in the hope of getting the vote over quickly so that voters would focus on the domestic issues on which the Democrats had an advantage. In early October, Gephardt cut short an attempt at a bipartisan counterresolution on the war by agreeing to an administration proposal. Daschle, and other Democratic leaders, fearing that they would suffer isolation and defeat if they opposed the war resolution, dropped their efforts at forcing a compromise and supported the Bush proposal. Four days after the vote on Iraq, Gephardt gave a major speech heralding the Democrats' social and economic programs but omitting any discussion of the prospect of war with Iraq. Gephardt's ill-conceived strategy allowed Bush free reign. During the last two weeks of the campaign, when Bush launched a whirlwind national tour in support of Republican candidates, rallying the country against the threat to its national security.

Linked with Bush's aggressive campaigning were some dirty campaign tactics in which Democratic candidates' patriotism and commitment to the war on terror were directly and repeatedly impugned. For example, in the Georgia Senate race, Republican Saxby Chambliss, who had never served in the military, attacked incumbent Max Cleland, a war hero who had lost his legs and an arm in Vietnam, for not supporting the Republican plan for the homeland security department. The Republicans even went so far as to run an ad linking Cleland to images of Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden.

In the short run at least, Bush's tactics worked. The Republicans had an outstanding election, gaining control of the Senate (and thereby unified control of government) with a two-seat pickup. Their margin in the House increased to 229 seats, to the Democrats' 205, with one Democrat voting independent. This was not the expected result in a first-term, off-year election with a bad economy.

The election results shocked rank-and-file Democrats. And once they got over their shock—helped by Mary Landrieu's run-off December victory in the Louisiana Senate contest—they were furious.

Why were the Republicans getting away with wrapping themselves in the flag while they conducted themselves in a hyperpartisan fashion? Why was the Democratic leadership being so deferential when their only reward was to get stabbed in the back by a Republican leadership and administration that weren't exactly playing by the Marquis of Queensbury rules? Old Democrats like Gephardt—deeply implicated as they were in the Democrats' nonconfrontational and unsuccessful strategy—didn't have any convincing answers. Nor did the DLC and orthodox New Democrat politicians like Joe Lieberman, who had offered some criticisms of the Gephardt-Daschle leadership but who had actually backed Bush's push toward war in Iraq. To increasing numbers of Democrats, it seemed like both factions of the party had had their chances—and had blown it.

That judgment was not mitigated by events in 2003, as Bush's push toward war culminated in the invasion of Iraq in late March. Leading Democrats, Old and New, supported the invasion and raised only sporadic criticism of the administration's obvious hyping of the Iraq weapons of mass destruction threat and the dubious intelligence that lay behind it. Once more, it seemed to Newer Democrats that all factions of the party were united in their ineffectiveness.

In late May, another round of tax cuts squeaked through Congress, with the Democrats putting up somewhat more resistance but still unable to stop the disciplined Republicans from pushing the cuts through. The new cuts brought the total cost of Bush's tax cuts to around \$3 trillion over the course of the decade.

Finally, in November, the GOP managed to push through a Medicare prescription drugs bill with the help of Ted Kennedy (again!). Kennedy had been promised that the final bill would reflect Democratic concerns embodied in the more generous and consumer-friendly Senate bill he helped pass. However, Democrats with those concerns were systematically excluded by the Republican leadership from the reconciliation process. As a result, the final bill almost exclusively reflected the GOP approach—less generous and zealously pro-



tective of the pharmaceutical companies' prerogatives—embodied in the House bill.

On the side, GOP leaders like Tom DeLay were instigating Republican legislatures in Texas (successfully), Colorado (unsuccessfully), and other states to redraw Congressional boundaries to make the states more favorable to electing Republicans. Coming right after the standard redistricting based on the decennial census, this move to re-redistrict states went beyond accepted political norms and practices and was one more signal to Democrats that the contemporary GOP recognized no limits in its drive for political power.

These events led many (mostly younger) Democrats, or Newer Democrats, to respond to the party's challenges, not by picking or switching factional sides but by creating new institutions and developing new approaches that built on the Clinton synthesis of the 1990s to take on the Republican Party of the 2000s. In their view, there was simply no other way to go if the Democrats were to win in the future. The following are some examples of the new institutions and approaches that developed in the 2001–2003 period.

*The Democratic Blogosphere.* Pioneered by Markos Moulitsas Zúniga of Daily Kos, Jerome Armstrong of MyDD, and Joshua Micah Marshall of Talking Points Memo, Democratic weblogs, or “blogs,” have grown exponentially since 2002, in terms of both readership and influence. The Daily Kos blog alone now registers well over 100,000 visits a day, and the initial pioneers have been joined by literally thousands more. Among them, they reach a Democratic audience of millions with a lively, opinionated mix of up-to-the-minute news, media criticism, poll results, electoral analyses, and anything else that seems politically relevant and interesting.

*MoveOn.org.* Whereas Democrats must come to visit the blogs and online magazines, MoveOn.org comes to visit Democrats. Founded in 1998 by software entrepreneurs Wes Boyd and Joan Blades to fight the Clinton impeachment drive of the right, the organization functions primarily via email and email-driven activist gath-

erings (“MeetUps”) to solicit contributions for progressive and Democratic causes, organize nonelectoral and electoral campaigns, and communicate anti-Republican political news. The organization now has more than 2 million members, and though still associated with protest politics and grassroots lobbying (on issues ranging from the Iraq war to media deregulation), it has moved increasingly into Democratic electoral politics.

*The Dean Campaign and Internet Fundraising.* Until late January 2004, the big news in the campaign for the Democratic nomination was the spectacular rise of Howard Dean. He came out of nowhere in 2003 to dominate the nomination race, leading in most state polls and critically far outdistancing his Democratic rivals in fundraising. Dean’s campaign raised \$40 million in 2003 from 280,000 individuals making an average contribution of \$143. Almost all of this fundraising was done over the Internet. As Noam Scheiber of the *New Republic* pointed out,<sup>14</sup> the secret of the Dean campaign’s success was figuring out that the Internet could be used to radically decrease the “cost per body” for a candidate seeking the nomination. In the past, candidates had to knock on doors, make phone calls, or send mail (and do it over and over again) to round up their supporters. With the Dean campaign’s methods, it was possible to generate supporters at quite a low cost—indeed, the campaign came out ahead of the game because one of the ways it organized these supporters was by getting them to contribute money online. In so doing, the campaign also mined these supporters for enthusiastic volunteers and generated a “movement” level of energy at the grassroots of the Democratic Party. That all this could be done so cheaply and quickly using the Internet and Internet-driven MeetUps was a signal to Newer Democrats that they were on the right track. This was something that

14. Noam Scheiber, “Organization Man: Joe Trippi Reinvents Campaigning,” *New Republic*, November 17, 2003.

New Democrats or New Old Democrats would never have thought of.

*The Democratic 527s.* There has been an amazing proliferation of Democratic-oriented 527s (the name comes from the section of the tax code under which they fall), created to get around the McCain-Feingold law's prohibition on soft money. These independent groups are launching huge get-out-the-vote drives, using their own elaborate targeting databases, as well as arranging massive buys of television ads to slam Bush and support John Kerry in the 2004 election. Some forty groups plan to spend more than \$300 million in these efforts.

*Center for American Progress.* The Center for American Progress (CAP) was founded in the last half of 2003, with John Podesta, former Clinton chief of staff, as CEO and backed by about \$10 million in contributions from wealthy Democrats like George Soros. By the spring of 2004, CAP had moved to a prominent, if not dominant, position among Democratic-leaning think tanks, eclipsing both the labor-liberal Economic Policy Institute and the New Democrat's Progressive Policy Institute.

What all these institutions and approaches have in common is a pragmatic Newer Democrat commitment to taking the Democratic Party as it actually is today—with the new coalition and the new vision of progressivism that has evolved over more than thirty years—and making it into a winning electoral instrument. Newer Democrats are *consolidating* a transformation of the Democratic Party instead of trying to launch a new one or fighting old battles in the manner of the DLC.

As the Democratic campaign has taken shape in 2004, it is easy to see how the Newer Democrat approach is influencing it. First, it's worth noting that neither the orthodox New Democrat Joe Lieberman nor the venerable New Old Democrat candidate Dick Gephardt ever developed any political traction; thus, both had to bow out of the race early. Wes Clark and John Edwards, who were not clearly

beholden to either party faction, lasted longer. And the victor, John Kerry, from the very beginning of his campaign, had strong backers from both wings of the party and consciously steered away from being either side's candidate. As a result, Kerry enjoys wide support from all segments of the party and takes an exceptionally unified Democratic Party into the general election.

Kerry has also successfully adopted Dean-style Internet fundraising. Within forty-eight hours of Super Tuesday, March 2, when Kerry wrapped up the nomination, he had raised \$4.6 million online. The money continued to pour in throughout March, helping Kerry raise an amazing \$43 million for the month and \$57 million for first quarter of the year, a presidential fundraising record. By the end of the second quarter, Kerry's fundraising had hit the astonishing total of \$182 million, putting him within shouting distance of President Bush's fundraising total, something political professionals had initially believed was impossible. This money is in addition to the money that will be spent on his behalf by the 527s. In March and April of 2004 alone, the 527s spent about \$28 million in the battleground states, attacking Bush as sort of an opening salvo in their campaign. The online Democratic Party—MoveOn and the Democratic blogosphere—is also fully mobilized on Kerry's behalf, directing their considerable energies against Bush and for Kerry and his campaign.

Kerry's policy and thematic approach reflect an effort to build on and extend the Clinton synthesis. He blends a consistently populist rhetoric with a moderate economic approach that emphasizes both deficit reduction and new spending on health care, jobs, and education. On foreign policy, he puts forward nuanced views (too nuanced, for some) that combine a willingness to use military force with the need to build international coalitions against terrorism and other threats. He has also avoided becoming entangled in divisive social issues like gun control and gay marriage, emphasizing his personal passion for hunting and his support for traditional marriage. None of this is to say, of course, that he has solved the problem of, say, rec-

onciling Robert Rubin–style economics with increased social spending. But solving that kind of problem rather than favoring one side or another of these long-running debates is clearly his intent.

Other signs abound that the 2004 Democratic campaign will illustrate the increasing irrelevance of the New Democrat–New Old Democrat divide. The New Democrat Network (NDN), a DLC spin-off that was originally supposed to function as the organization’s political action committee, has now clearly departed from its parent organization’s politics. NDN’s president, Simon Rosenberg, has committed his organization to promoting the Dean campaign’s methods of organizing and fundraising and works closely with Daily Kos founder Zúniga. Indeed, when the Dean campaign was in its ascendancy and DLC leaders were excoriating Dean for leading the party down the path to Mondale-McGovernism and certain ruin, Rosenberg pointedly refused to make those criticisms and concentrated instead on praising the Dean campaign for its organizing innovations. In general, Rosenberg and his organization seem to have lost interest in the intraparty polemics that still animate DLC leaders.

However, even the DLC leaders are softening their approach, as they perceive the decreasing likelihood that a factional defense of New Democrat principles will yield much political influence. Will Marshall remarked earlier in 2004 that “we are all populists now,” thanks, he said, to the need to oppose Bush’s “crony capitalism.” Given that this statement came from the leader of an organization that had invested considerable energy in denouncing populism throughout its history, particularly after the 2000 election, there was undoubtedly more to this admission than Marshall was willing to admit. Essentially, the market for orthodox New Democrat approaches has dried up, and the New Democrats are having to adapt to that reality.

New Old Democrats, for their part, are showing little interest in pressing Kerry to adopt a more forthrightly liberal/populist program. They are well aware of the New Democrat tinge to much of that program, but as Dick Gephardt put it once, “we are all New Dem-

ocrats now.” The New Old Democrats realize that if they hope to retain their influence in the party, they must accept the emphasis on winning and the de-emphasis on ideological debate, which are the hallmarks of the Newer Democrat approach. Indeed, in early 2004, moves were afoot to bury the hatchet with their New Democrat rivals by, among other things, publishing joint articles (for example, by Will Marshall and Robert Kuttner<sup>15</sup>) in the liberal-leaning *American Prospect* (now edited by Newer Democrat sympathizer Michael Tomasky).

It seems likely, however, that despite this moderation, New Old Democrats, like orthodox New Democrats, will continue to decline in influence. If not dead, they are certainly dying. Gephardt and Kennedy, the quintessential representatives of this tendency, have taken huge hits to their reputations in the past several years, and replacements of their stature are not obvious. This doesn't mean that the ideas and concerns of these Democrats will disappear, for they are intimate parts of the new vision of progressivism forged by the Clinton synthesis, but it is as *parts* of that synthesis that the New Old Democrats' ideas will endure. Their full-throated New Deal liberalism will never again be the dominant current of thought within the party.

15. Robert Kuttner and Will Marshall, “Come Together,” *American Prospect*, June 2004.