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MANAGING EDITOR:**

The **Democratic Strategist** has three editorial goals—(1) to provide an explicitly and unapologetically partisan platform for the discussion of Democratic political strategy, (2) to insist upon greater use of data and greater reliance on empirical evidence in strategic thinking and (3) to act as a neutral forum and center of discussion for all sectors of the Democratic community.

As **The Democratic Strategists'** editorial philosophy states, the publication will be "proudly partisan, firmly and insistently based on facts and data and emphatically open to all sectors and currents of opinion within the Democratic community".

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THE MEDIA COVERAGE OF RAND PAUL'S "THE GOP WAS ALWAYS FOR CIVIL RIGHTS" REVISIONIST HISTORY FAILED TO CLEARLY REPORT THE CENTRAL REALITY: THAT THE EXPLOITATION OF WHITE RACIAL RESENTMENT WAS FOR DECADES THE GOP'S FUNDAMENTAL POLITICAL STRATEGY REGARDING AFRICAN-AMERICANS.

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Rand Paul's recent appearances on largely African-American college campuses to promote the notion that the GOP was always a firm supporter of civil rights and the true friend of African-Americans was met with widespread and well-deserved ridicule. But the commentary on his revisionist history lessons failed to confront a key fact: this claim is not only utterly and completely false, but is most emphatically not just an idiosyncratic notion of Paul's. It is an integral part of a larger attempt by conservatives to whitewash the GOP's shameful past on racial issues, an attempt that extends from Glenn Beck, the Tea Party and other right-wing commentators on the one hand, to the pages of the *National Review* on the other.

As Ed Kilgore noted in a recent commentary at the *Washington Monthly's* Political Animal blog:

Paul seems to be peddling the highly revisionist take on civil rights history laid out last year in *National Review* by Kevin Williamson, which holds that Republicans always were and always will be the party of civil rights while Democrats have consciously switched their white supremacist tactics from Jim Crow to "plantation" socialism. It's a hallucinatory approach to developments too recent and too well known to fool people about, and for that reason, it's a line of argument that tends to offend people, particularly those being told they are fools for voting Democratic.

The evidence that refutes this attempt to rewrite history is simply incontrovertible. Just by themselves, widely-known public statements by the major architects of the GOP's "Southern Strategy" clearly demonstrate three things:

- That the GOP's "Southern Strategy" was an approach consciously designed to exploit white racial resentment of African-Americans in order to benefit the GOP.
- That it was designed and executed by the most important political strategists of the Republican Party – the men who were top political advisors to Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan and George Herbert Walker Bush.
- That it was so deeply offensive to all African-Americans that the head of the Republican National Committee felt obligated to formally apologize for it in the mid - 2000s.

It is outrageous that these three facts did not appear in every single one of the mainstream commentaries on Rand Paul's Soviet-style rewriting of history. After all, it was not as if the facts were at all difficult to find. All the mainstream commentators had to do to find the precise, fully documented quotes that they needed was to open up a source as simple as

Wikipedia and type in the words “Southern Strategy.” Had they bothered to look, here’s what they would have found:

As with most Wikipedia entries, the entry on the “Southern Strategy” starts with a quick summary:

Though the “Solid South” had been a longtime Democratic Party stronghold due to the Democratic Party’s defense of slavery before the American Civil War and segregation for a century thereafter, many white Southern Democrats stopped supporting the party following the civil rights plank of the Democratic campaign in 1948 (triggering the Dixiecrats), the African-American Civil Rights Movement, the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965, and desegregation.

The strategy was first adopted under future Republican President Richard Nixon and Republican Senator Barry Goldwater in the late 1960s. The strategy was successful in many regards. It contributed to the electoral realignment of Southern states to the Republican Party, but at the expense of losing more than 90 percent of black voters to the Democratic Party.

The extensive and fully footnoted body of the Wikipedia entry identifies the origin of the southern strategy in the exodus of white southerners from the Democrats in 1964 as a reaction to the 1963 civil rights act:

1964 Presidential candidate Barry Goldwater won his home state of Arizona and five states in the Deep South. The Southern states, traditionally Democratic up to that time, voted Republican primarily as a statement of opposition to the Civil Rights Act, which had been passed by Johnson and the Democrats in Congress earlier that year...

The Wikipedia entry then proceeds to focus in on Richard Nixon’s political strategist Kevin Phillips and his 1970 book, *The Emerging Republican Majority*, which became the major strategic blueprint behind the Nixon and Agnew political playbook. As it says:

...Although the phrase “Southern strategy” is often attributed to Nixon’s political strategist Kevin Phillips, he did not originate it, but merely popularized it. In an interview included in a 1970 New York Times article, he touched on its essence:

From now on, the Republicans are never going to get more than 10 to 20 percent of the Negro vote and they don’t need any more than that...but Republicans would be shortsighted if they weakened enforcement of the Voting Rights Act. The more Negroes who register as Democrats in the South, the sooner the Negrophobe whites will quit the Democrats and become Republicans. That’s where the votes are. Without that prodding from the blacks, the whites will backslide into their old comfortable arrangement with the local Democrats.

Even four decades later, the cynicism of this strategy remains stunning and Phillips himself later forcefully repudiated and apologized for his earlier views. But the strategy was key to

the gradual political realignment across the South that began in the 1970s, a realignment in which African-Americans dramatically increased their role in the Southern Democratic Party and in campaigns as Democratic candidates while in response Southern white voters increasingly shifted their support to the GOP.

The Southern Strategy was equally central to the approach of the Republican Party's next major political strategist – Lee Atwater. After the 1980 election Atwater became an aide in the Ronald Reagan administration, working under political director Ed Rollins. In 1984, Rollins managed Reagan's re-election campaign, and Atwater became the campaign's deputy director and political director. In 1988 Atwater was the campaign manager for George Herbert Walker Bush's successful 1988 presidential campaign and after the election became chairman of the Republican National Committee. In short, Atwater was by far the most important and influential GOP political strategist of the 1980s.

The Wikipedia entry provides the following, deeply revealing story:

Bob Herbert, a *New York Times* columnist, reported a 1981 interview with Lee Atwater, published in *Southern Politics* in the 1990s by Alexander P. Lamis, in which Lee Atwater discussed politics in the South:

Questioner: But the fact is, isn't it, that Reagan does get to the Wallace voter and to the racist side of the Wallace voter by doing away with legal services, by cutting down on food stamps?

Atwater: You start out in 1954 by saying, "N****r, n****r, n****r." By 1968 you can't say "n****r" — 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....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****r, n****r."

Herbert wrote in the same column, "The truth is that there was very little that was subconscious about the G.O.P.'s relentless appeal to racist whites. Tired of losing elections, it saw an opportunity to renew itself by opening its arms wide to white voters who could never forgive the Democratic Party for its support of civil rights and voting rights for blacks."

Seen with this background, Rand Paul's attempt to tell African-American college students that the GOP always supported civil rights and was the real friend of black folk while the Democrats were their real enemies can only be described as utterly dishonest, and in its aggressiveness, actively offensive. The truth about the GOP's cynical exploitation of white racial resentment has always been so brutally clear to every African-American that in the mid-2000s the head of the Republican National Committee actually decided to explicitly apologize, a fact that can also be found in the same Wikipedia entry. As it notes:

Ken Mehlman, Bush's campaign manager and Chairman of the RNC, held several large meetings with African-American business, community, and religious leaders. In his speeches, he apologized for his party's use of the Southern Strategy in the past.

In 2005, When asked about the strategy of using race as an issue to build GOP dominance in the once-Democratic South, Mehlman replied,

“Republican candidates often have prospered by ignoring black voters and even by exploiting racial tensions,” and, “by the ‘70s and into the ‘80s and ‘90s, the Democratic Party solidified its gains in the African-American community, and we Republicans did not effectively reach out. Some Republicans gave up on winning the African-American vote, looking the other way or trying to benefit politically from racial polarization. I am here today as the Republican chairman to tell you we were wrong.”

It was very safe and easy for mainstream commentators to criticize Rand Paul. But the real scandal was their utter and complete failure to powerfully and categorically refute Paul's profoundly dishonest rewriting of history with the raw quotes and facts that were available to them literally at their fingertips.

And there is one other critical fact that needs to be underlined as well. Rand Paul is emphatically not alone in this cynical attempt at an inversion of political history. Glenn Beck, spokesmen for the Tea Party and other conservative talk radio hosts now widely circulate the lie that Martin Luther King was a Republican (when in fact he publicly called on African-Americans to [vote against Barry Goldwater in 1964](#)¹ and successfully negotiated the pivotal Civil Rights Act with Democratic president John Kennedy and the Voting Rights Act with Lyndon Johnson). The *National Review*, once viewed as representing intellectually honest conservatism, now shamelessly promulgates a more verbose but equally dishonest version of the *“The GOP was always African-Americans' real friend”* myth and the Republican National Committee now effectively disavows the apology of its former chairman.

It is rarely appropriate to use the term “The Big Lie Technique” in modern political discourse because of its close association with totalitarianism. But in this particular case there is simply no other phrase available in the English language that can adequately express the cynical essence of the GOP's current attempt to rewrite the history of its decades-long exploitation of white racial resentment. If Republicans want to perform “outreach” to African-American voters, and that would be an excellent development for both political and moral reasons, they should begin with a thoroughgoing disavowal, not denial, of their past strategies and tactics.

¹http://www.thedemocraticstrategist.org/strategist/2010/08/glen_beck_wants_to_reclaim_mar.php