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## How'd We Get Here?

### I. Introduction

- A. Political party support among Christians differs by race
- B. In this video, we are going to explore how black Protestants and white evangelicals particularly came to identify with two different political parties.

### II. A Political Realignment

- A. Between the beginning and the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the United States went through a political realignment
  - 1. South went from dominantly Democratic to dominantly Republican
  - 2. The two parties became more ideologically homogenous
  - 3. African Americans moved from aligning with the Republican Party to the Democratic Party
- B. What explains political realignment?: Expanding federal government, secular humanism, gender issues, and race.
- C. Expanding Federal Government and Race
  - 1. 1930s: Some white, Southern Democrats accept federal intervention into the economy during the Depression.
  - 2. 1940s: Growing hostility to federal intervention by (among others) transplanted, white Southern Democrats and a move to the more libertarian wing of the Republican Party.
  - 3. 1964 Election: Barry Goldwater runs for president on pro-states' rights platform. He loses the election, but does well in the South. He wins only 5% of the African American vote.
  - 4. After 1964, white South becomes increasingly Republican and African Americans become increasingly Democratic

### III. A Religious Realignment

- A. In the last half of the twentieth-century, white evangelicals, North and South, became reliably Republican voters. Again, expanding federal government and race play a role. So too do secular humanism and gender issues.

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B. The Civil Rights Movement demonstrated that the federal government would intervene in the states. This intervention worried some conservatives, North and South. Historians debate why.

1. Answer #1: White conservatives rallied against federal intervention because it was intervention on behalf of black people.
  - a) Evidence: Key leaders of what became the Religious Right fought moves to end tax-exempt status for private schools that racially discriminated, including Bob Jones University. These leaders backed Ronald Reagan for president because he promised that the schools would not lose tax-exemption.
2. Answer #2: Even if the above is true, it does not fully explain what galvanized white evangelicals nationwide. More factors played into the identification of white evangelicals with the Republican Party.
  - a) Factor #1: Supreme Court rulings calling mandated, teacher-led Bible reading and prayer in public schools unconstitutional. This seemed, to some white evangelicals, to constitute an unwarranted federal intervention into what should have been a local issue and to establish secular humanism—putting people, not God, at the center of reality—as the de facto state religion.
    - (1) Led to the conclusions that the interventionist federal government should be shrunk and that it should be run by conservatives who would intervene in the right ways (if at all).
  - b) Factor #2: Gender issues. Movements for women’s rights and gay rights in the 1960s and 1970s united white evangelicals. Unlike racial segregation, the idea that God used gender to order the world was biblically supportable.
  - c) Factor #3: Abortion. After *Roe v. Wade*, white evangelicals became convinced that abortion was a national crisis and that it was a manifestation of secular humanism. Figures on the Right also argued (convincingly for many) that anti-abortion politics made the most sense with conservative policies.

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#### IV. What About Race?

A. Although Answer #2 might seem like it has nothing to do with race, it does. White evangelicals and black Protestants (including some black evangelicals) tend to make different decisions about what issues present the greatest threats the country and about what issues you should compromise on.

B. Americans (including white evangelicals and black Protestants) have different understandings of what racism is, how much it affects the country, and what to do about it.

1. Answers to the question “if blacks would only try harder, they would be just as well off as whites” vary considerably by race and political ideology.

a) Americans disagree on whether racism is primarily an interpersonal problem or a systemic social ill and on how level the playing field is for people of different races.

b) Americans then also disagree on how to address racism and how urgent addressing racism is.

#### V. Conclusion

A. Many religious historians, Christian and otherwise, agree that racism is a systemic social ill.