

The American South: The Tail That Wags the Dog of American Politics

Abstract:

This paper argues that the South exerts extraordinary influence on American politics; that American liberalism has been shaped by its most illiberal region. Although the American South was poorer and developed later than other regions of the country, it has been in the vanguard of social and political change in the last half of the twentieth century. I examine the vanguard role of the South in four areas: (1) labor relations where employer resistance and state hostility to unions that was once endemic to the South is now common practice outside the region; (2) voting patterns where the defection of white conservatives from the Democratic Party in the South has since become prevalent outside of Dixie, making the American party system more polarized and more competitive; (3) Congress where the rise of Southern Republicans has tilted Congress to the right; (4) and presidential elections where the size and unity of the South gives the Republican Party an extraordinary advantage in the Electoral College. In essence, American politics has been shaped by its most atypical region.

Alan Draper received his BA from the University of Wisconsin at Madison, his MA and Ph. D. in political science at Columbia University, and is currently a Professor of Government at St. Lawrence University in upstate New York. His published work includes: *A Rope of Sand: The AFL-CIO Committee on Political Education, 1955-1967* (Praeger, 1989); and *Conflict of Interest: Organized Labor and the Civil Rights Movement in the South, 1954-1968* (Cornell University Press, 1994), which was awarded the Outstanding Book on the subject of human rights in North America from the Gustavus Myers Center for the Study of Human Rights in North America, 1997. He is also a co-author of two textbooks, *The Politics of Power: A Critical Introduction to American Government* with Ira Katznelson and Mark Kesselman which is in its 6th edition (2011); and *The Good Society: An Introduction to Comparative Politics* which was just published in its second edition. He is on the Editorial Board of *Labor History* and was appointed a Fulbright Distinguished Chair at the University of Innsbruck for Spring 2011.