

COMMENTARY ON RACE, VALUES, AND CONVERTING THE UNDECIDED VOTERS OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY

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In the 2004 elections, the Democratic Party failed to capture the presidency and saw its minority diminish in both houses of Congress. Analysts and politicians attributed the defeats to strong GOP campaigning, continuing fears of terrorism, and the preeminence of social values issues. Of the many commentators offering their views, one was Oklahoma Democrat senatorial candidate Brad Carson. After his defeat, Carson wrote in the *New Republic* that “while the defeat was all [his] own, the failure was of the party...which uncritically embraces a modernity that so many others reject.” Although Carson may be writing with sullenness following his loss, his characterization represents the ambivalent position in which the party finds itself. The party coalition that once joined George Wallace and George McGovern now consists of a diminishing alliance between those who support socially and economically liberal positions and those who support populist appeals while holding on to more socially conservative beliefs. Meanwhile, the Republican Party since the 1960s has successfully siphoned away socially conservative whites.

This gradual realignment presents several dilemmas for the national Democratic Party. Its new political reality has resulted in the popularization of social values issues such that minorities, more socially conservative than white Democrats, find themselves in both precarious and advantageous positions within party politics. Strong minority turnout is essential to the party’s success and thus minority voters have become a significant electoral target. Nevertheless, the strongly dissimilar ideological and religious roots of minorities and white liberals make their coexistence in the Democratic Party increasingly challenging. Assuming that American politics are situated upon two dimensions of economic and social issues (Schofield *et al.* 247), the Democratic Party is at great risk of alienating one of the largest remaining voting blocs within their coalition: socially conservative minority voters.

This trend has been particularly apparent in Missouri during the recent election cycles. Missouri has voted for the winning presidential candidate

in all but one election since 1900. It is widely recognized as the quintessential bellwether state. Mirroring national trends, recent elections in Missouri have been unsuccessful for Democrats. Within the last decade, Missouri Democrats have lost control of the State House of Representatives, the State Senate, the governorship, and have failed to retain the United States Senate seat won posthumously by former Governor Mel Carnahan. The *Almanac of American Politics* suggests that the fortunes of Missouri Democrats have declined because “positions insisted on by black politicians and voters in St. Louis and Kansas City are unpopular elsewhere in the state...” This paper presents a contrary argument. As Representative Carson noted, the Democratic Party at the national and state level finds itself increasingly distanced from socially conservative voices. Black communities, which continue to have higher average church attendance than majority white areas and where ministers continue to play strong roles as community leaders, are a large group representation of these socially conservative voices. Their frustrations with the party are in many ways related to the current differences between their values, based in religion and the values of their white liberal counterparts in the Democratic Party coalition. In comparing national dilemmas for Democrats, specifically focused on the Democratic primary contest from Missouri’s Fifth Congressional District, this paper will discuss how values-based appeals among both minority and socially conservative white voters factored heavily in this Missouri district level primary. This paper will also examine how the lack of attention to these same appeals greatly harmed the Democratic Party at the national level.

THE MISSOURI FIFTH DISTRICT AND THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY COALITION

As popular sentiment among white Americans has removed race from the list of pressing social values issues, the cleavage between black and white Democratic Party voters has become more apparent in both national and district level politics. Both Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton demonstrated these dynamics in their presidential campaigns in 1984 and 2004, respectively, as they ran as party outsiders crusading on behalf of the ‘taken for granted’ black vote in the Democratic Party. The 2004 election cycle also produced these types of campaign appeals in a number of district level races. The examples in this cycle came primarily from Democratic primary battles for federal offices throughout the South and Midwest.

The 2004 Missouri Fifth Congressional District Democratic primary was among those races that highlighted strong clashes along racial and cultural lines in a district whose demographics parallel the national electorate.

This contest featured a former Kansas City Mayor and black minister from the United Methodist Church, the Reverend Emanuel Cleaver, II, whose roots were in civil rights activism and civic causes, against a young and energetic Jewish intellectual, Dr. Jamie Metzler, a former Georgetown University Law Professor and advisor to several East Coast Democratic politicians. Much like the rest of the lower Midwest, the district has a socially conservative ethos, but it is also the more liberal, cosmopolitan heart of the Great Plains. The table below demonstrates that the demographics of the district are comparable to those of the rest of the nation with a non-Hispanic white population of slightly below 70 percent, similar percentages of persons holding bachelors degrees, and identical poverty levels (US Census Bureau).

Figure 1

	Missouri 5 th CD	United States
(Non-Hispanic) Whites	68.8%	69.1%
Nonwhite Persons ¹	36.8%	37.3%
Persons with Bachelor's Deg.	22.9%	24.4%
Homeownership Rate	62.4%	66.2%
Persons below Poverty Level	12.4%	12.4%

Beyond the basic demographics offered by this census, the district also reflects the many tests before the Democratic Party. Chief among them are the contradictions in their constituencies on the local level. Like the party elsewhere, Fifth District Democrats depend on roughly 90 percent of the black vote and a lower but strong showing among Hispanics. This has been a key source of discord in local Democratic politics, where blacks, in particular, have felt isolated and ignored by white migration to suburban areas over recent decades. Beginning in the 1970s, court-ordered school desegregation programs caused whites to leave urban areas. In Kansas City, Missouri, this problem was even more drastic since many whites relocated to suburban areas in Kansas, taking with them vital tax revenue and political influence from Missouri. The results of this white disinvestment in the city include decaying civic resources due to inadequate funding bases and

¹Please note that the Census Bureau figures for racial identification used in Figure 1 surpass 100 percent because they are based on questions that allow individuals to select all racial groups which apply to them.

strong black-white animosities in local Democratic politics.

The stagnating influence of organized labor has also reformed the party coalition. Since the early 1990s, some of the chief providers of organized labor in the area have significantly reduced their workforces. Among those companies are American Airlines, General Motors, and Ford Motor Company. As a result, union numbers have declined, but they continue to exert disproportionate influence upon the local party and district level government. An additional concern for Democrats has been the strength of the Republican Party in appealing to working-class voters on value-driven issues. Although the GOP is maligned as the party of big business and the “Benedict Arnold CEO’s” as popularized by John Kerry, it has nonetheless brought new issues such as social values and homeland security to the core of working class voter concerns. An example of this phenomenon is the success of the constitutional amendment banning gay marriage in Michigan, where members of union households accounted for 43 percent of all voters (Labor Research Association). Relying upon value-based appeals such as the debate over gay marriage, the Republican Party has made inroads into traditional Democratic groups. Republicans have also made these types of appeals to workers within this district. During the summer of 2004, Missouri’s Junior Senator Jim Talent met with executives from the local AFL-CIO for the first time in his term. Republican officials have successfully shed the “wealthy and well connected” label with a majority of voters, resulting in a mainstream Missouri Republican Party.

However, the Democratic Party coalition within the district includes not only poor and middle class constituencies, but also an influential set of wealthy individuals. The irony is that there are very few of these individuals and a significant number reside outside of the district in Kansas-side suburbs. Of those who actually live within the Missouri Fifth Congressional District, most tend to reside in a narrow collection of exclusive neighborhoods along the same corridor, send their children to the same set of private schools, and have conflicting interests with many local Democratic constituencies, particularly blacks. These conflicting interests have been most apparent in debates related to local public education, but also in traditional issues that have partitioned Kansas City’s blacks and whites in public discourse, such as increased funding for public transportation, indigent access to health care, and affirmative action within contracts awarded by the city government. The local Jewish community was a subset of this group of affluent individuals. Although, their population in the region is near 20,000—less than one percent of the population—they constituted the most significant bloc of all campaign donors to Metzler’s campaign. The support of this group is vital for a successful Democratic candidate. In just

one example, during the general election, the two wealthiest zip codes in Kansas City, Missouri accounted for slightly less than half of all individual contributions to the remaining candidates (Center for Responsive Politics). Indeed, as evidenced by the importance of this small group of individuals, Metzl's fundraising operations sent direct mailings to those listed in alumni directories of three local private schools and made campaign stops at his private former high school and grade school.

Thus mirroring many races between Democrats nationally, the Fifth District race had underlying and divisive themes of race, religion, economics, and culture. Cleaver's base consisted of minority groups, socially conservative Democrats, and organized labor, while Metzl's core supporters were generally affluent whites. Although both candidates avoided this portrayal, media and political operatives quickly deemed the race as a stark contrast between two core bases of the Democratic Party governing coalition. An editorialist in the district's premier black publication, *The Kansas City Call* went so far as to suggest, "This race will revolve around black vs. white, black vs. Jew, elected vs. non-elected, old vs. young ... and suburban vs. urban." The rhetoric from this campaign is similar to the blatantly stereotypical attacks on liberals during the presidential primaries. In one advertisement, an elderly New Hampshire couple tells Howard Dean to take his "tax-hiking, government-expanding, latte-drinking, sushi-eating, Volvo-driving, *New York Times*-reading, Hollywood-loving, left-wing freak show back to Vermont, where it belongs" (qtd. in *The Washington Times*). Throughout his race, Candidate Metzl faced a litany of similarly unsubstantiated attacks that sought to highlight the cultural nuances between his group, the Democratic liberals, and the rest of the party.

THE CANDIDATES

Long considered the most powerful part of Kansas City's influence on Missouri politics, which St. Louis area and Southern Missouri politicians have dominated throughout history, the Fifth Congressional District seat held politicians that were influential on the national stage. However, over the last decade, the seat has declined in influence. With Republican Party control of Congress beginning in 1995 and lacking tenure, the Democratic Representative has had few opportunities to hold powerful committee assignments. The Congresswoman who held the seat for five terms also happened to be an alcoholic. She decided not to run for re-election after the *Kansas City Star* released details about her hospitalization subsequent to a fall down an escalator in a House office building and her frequent alcohol-induced tirades with top aides. As a result, the seat had lost a great deal of

its luster. Nonetheless, the open seat received two high quality candidates in former Mayor Emanuel Cleaver and young Dr. Metzl.

Despite the quality of both candidates, the fact that this was actually a competitive race was a bit surprising. Emanuel Cleaver has roots in Kansas City for more than a generation and even has a street named for him that ran through the heart of the district. Cleaver began his career as a City Councilman in the late 1970s and voters of Kansas City elected him as their first black mayor in 1991, a post he served for two terms until 1999. Following his term, Cleaver served as an advisor to the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. Cleaver avoided most contentious debates throughout his government service and gained the reputation of a unifier. He had an amicable relationship with then-Governor John Ashcroft during the early part of his service and had similarly strong partnerships with Republican Senators John Danforth and Kit Bond. Bond was even a periodic guest at Cleaver's church. Another characteristic that greatly enhanced Cleaver's reputation was his role as a spiritual leader in the community and nationwide. Although Kansas citizens were long familiar with the Reverend Cleaver, he received even more acclaim after providing a nationally televised prayer at the first National Football League contest following the September 11 attacks, when the Kansas City Chiefs hosted the New York Giants.

With Cleaver's considerable popularity following his government experience, he had a seemingly easy threshold for success. Indeed, before he announced his candidacy, the party had promised him that his entrance into the race would clear the field of candidates; to an extent that did occur – two candidates dropped out of the race almost immediately. However, the opening he left for Jamie Metzl reflected a number of his shortcomings as a candidate. Dave Helling, a political reporter and commentator for the local CBS affiliate wrote that, "His problem is that, much like George Bush, he doesn't take questions well, particularly from opponents (or reporters). His instinct is to snap back at any query that implies a criticism of his record." This character trait had led him into trouble as he refused to answer simple questions that could have cleared his reputation. For example, days before announcing his candidacy, local media outlets reported Cleaver received a \$36,000 overnight loan to cover taxes owed on a suburban carwash. Although his impropriety was never formally proven, Cleaver received a significant amount of criticism for not disclosing the reasons he needed such a sizeable loan in such a short amount of time. Numerous allegations dating back to his two terms as mayor also damaged the Cleaver campaign. The many unanswered questions began to remove the luster from the Cleaver name, leaving an opening for Jamie Metzl to attack him on ethical issues.

Metzl had a background that was in stark contrast to Cleaver's history in city politics. At the age of thirty-five, Metzl had already received a doctorate, worked in the United Nations, the White House, and Congress. His résumé impressed even the most ardent Cleaver supporters. However, he also had several considerable negatives working against him in the campaign. The first issue, which Metzl never successfully silenced was the view shared by many that he was an outsider. During the campaign, Cleaver ran advertisements noting the fact that Metzl had not paid property taxes in Kansas City for six years. During debates, Cleaver also frequently alluded to Metzl's absence by reminding audiences, "I am from here." Although Metzl tried to diminish the importance of his residency, Cleaver's attacks were accurate. Metzl had graduated from a Kansas City preparatory school in 1986, and never returned in a professional manner until the year before the campaign. The Metzl campaign offered a response that highlighted the fact that Dr. Metzl's service was in the federal government working on behalf of the people of Missouri and the rest of the country. However, this was, at best, an exaggeration due primarily to the long amount of time Metzl spent in academia.

Dr. Metzl has an impressive academic background which includes a law degree from Harvard University, a doctorate in History from Oxford University, two published books, and a teaching position at Georgetown University; he spent a great deal of time trying to make his education an asset and not a liability in his campaign. The voters of the Fifth District were highly skeptical of his ability to relate with the average district citizen. Nonetheless, Metzl's youth did provide an opening for him to appeal to voters without seeming to conform to the persona of a university professor, which few with the exception of the late Senator Paul Wellstone have managed to use as an advantage.

Also of concern to Metzl were the frequent attacks labelling him as an East Coast outsider and homosexual. Much like the portrayal of Michael Dukakis as a "Harvard Yard Liberal" in the 1988 presidential race, opponents repeatedly linked Candidate Metzl to the elite liberal class satirized in the aforementioned attack advertisement on Howard Dean. Metzl sustained more of this brand of criticism when the emerging social values issues of 2004 came to the surface, primarily the battle over same-sex marriages. This was mainly the result of whisper campaigns by Metzl attackers that questioned his sexuality.

Nonetheless, Metzl had several advantages over Cleaver. From the beginning of his campaign, he used Washington-based consultants who carved out an identity for the political novice. With his father's story of escape from Nazi-dominated Eastern Europe, he had the unyielding support

of Jewish individuals as well as local and national Jewish organizations. He had a strong fundraising advantage over Reverend Cleaver due to his strength in the Jewish community and among wealthy individuals whom he had schooled with in Kansas City and during his college years.

An additional factor that researchers would assert as an advantage for Dr. Metzl was his ethnicity. Joel Lieske and Jan William Hillard argued in their study on urban elections that although Americans debate national politics upon largely economic and social views, urban politics generally revolve around “racial, ethnic, and cultural divisions that” are more concerned with “social access, and cultural lifestyles” (Lieske and Hillard 556). Campaigning in a district where whites outnumbered blacks five to one, Metzl should have had an identification advantage with the electorate in being white, the factor that neutralized his advantage was the cultural lifestyle issue.

Therefore, regardless of the many idiosyncrasies of each candidate’s background, ethics, or campaign, the primary collapsed into a contest on race and cultural values. The media and political figures emphasized the negatives of both candidates and frequently hinted at the race’s inherent battle between black and white and socially liberal versus socially conservative interests. Unfortunately for Metzl, 2004 also presented the surfacing of cultural values among the most pressing issues in a reformed political discourse. Metzl may have been able to survive the campaign partitioned on factors of race, but he was fated for defeat when the media provoked the first questions about his own social values.

MEDIA INFLUENCE, CAMPAIGN STRATEGY, AND PUBLIC RESPONSE

The media plays a vital role in defining the issues and rhetoric before the electorate (Terkildsen and Damore 684). The local media ensured that the contest would remain tied to ethnicity and social values. From the outset, political writers and pundits in the area offered a name to the combative Democratic primary, “The Reverend versus the Résumé.” One of the initial facets of the media’s participation in the race was the clear partisanship of the ethnic media. Days before his announcement, Metzl received an above the fold, full page profile in the *Kansas City Jewish Chronicle* and had expected to receive positive coverage from it for the entirety of the race. Indeed, the *Jewish Chronicle* did not even prominently feature Cleaver until he had won the primary. The same imbalance was evident in the area’s premier black publication, the *Kansas City Call*. During the campaign, Metzl received a weekly thrashing from the *Call*. In one editorial, Eric Wesson, who also served as the campaign beat writer for the paper, offered a tacit

endorsement of Cleaver in writing:

[Metzl] has all of what appears to be the right answers, that is scary, and a plan or two, which is even scarier, usually when whites have plans, blacks are excluded... Rev. Cleaver on the other hand has the experience to get things done and getting people to work together... He has the support and a good relationship with all of the elected officials in the state, city and county, something Metzl does not ("Getting").

With the *Call* and the *Jewish Chronicle* serving as biased media for both campaigns, the mainstream media's role was more important than usual.

However, local television and the leading area newspaper, the *Kansas City Star*, also played into the emphasis on race and culture in the primary. Literature on biracial congressional level contests suggests that the mainstream media plays an essential role in highlighting racial differences and, in particular, mobilizing black and white voters for different reasons (Terkildsen and Damore 684). Not only does media coverage consistently emphasizes the race of black candidates and their core constituency – black voters, it also often cues support among black voters who still find race to be a significant impetus behind vote choice, much like partisan identification (Terkildsen and Damore 691). Metzl had to consider the factor of increased black turnout due to enlarged media coverage of the racialized election. To combat this he sought to dampen black support of Rev. Cleaver or at least to court their vote himself. He ran a number of advertisements featuring several prominent African-Americans who supported his campaign, but his efforts to increase black support were unsuccessful.

In addition to focusing upon race, the free media also frequently discussed the families of the two candidates, which turned out to be a tremendous negative for the Metzl campaign. Assertions about family were easy to make for the local media. Emanuel Cleaver's wife, Dianne, was well known in the community and his children had been a part of a number of his speeches dating back to his days on the city council. Metzl, by having no wife or children and being a devout support of same-sex marriages, led socially moderate voters away from him.

Due to his fundraising advantage, Metzl used paid media to keep questions about Cleaver's ethics in the forefront. Many political scientists suggest that the effectiveness of negative campaign advertising lies in its ability to diminish the turnout of core constituencies (Ansolabehere et al. 829). Metzl appeared to play this strategy well until these attacks backfired. Cleaver supporters began to charge Jamie Metzl with racism. They sug-

gested his advertisements appealed to long-held stereotypes of black politicians as corrupt. Shortly thereafter the Metzl campaign was inundated with calls from supporters, many from Jewish constituents, who feared his advertisements would harm the already tenuous relationship between the local black and Jewish communities.

Within only one month of the entry of Emanuel Cleaver, the race had highlighted combative and dissimilar factions within the Democratic Party coalition. Suddenly the opposition derided the actual issues both candidates discussed as blatant appeals along racial and cultural lines that sought to avoid addressing the concerns of the opposing constituency. Metzl received criticism for many speeches before local synagogues in which he discussed foreign policy and Middle East affairs, while rarely discussing issues pertaining to job creation and social safety-net programs. Others criticized Cleaver for his frequent appearances at labor events, while having surprisingly little to say about foreign policy issues. What was lost in characterizations by the news media and in the barbs exchanged over the airwaves was any actual comparison between the candidates on any of these important issues. Due to the manner in which the race proceeded on television, the internet, and in print, the campaign became a competition between blacks and Jews, urbanites and suburbanites, and many of the other contestants the overzealous *Call* editorial had predicted would be involved.

The election night returns verified the assumptions of those in the media who saw the contest as one that divided core groups within the Democratic Party coalition. Cleaver defeated Metzl by a three-to-two ratio. As expected, Cleaver overwhelmingly carried the majority black and urban districts and Metzl performed adequately in the western and more affluent areas of Kansas City near the state line (Kansas City Election Board). Cleaver gained his advantage in the majority white and competitive southern and eastern suburbs of Kansas City. Although Metzl had successfully raised troubling questions that increased Cleaver's negatives, white voters in the southern and eastern suburbs, areas that went for Bush-Cheney in 2000, handed Cleaver a resounding victory (Jackson County Boards of Elections). The day of the primary election was also the day the amendment to ban gay marriage passed by a 40-point margin in Missouri and passed in both Kansas City and the rest of the district. In the suburbs, Metzl had the most favorable media coverage and influential endorsements, but it was clear that the white socially conservative Democratic primary voter in the Missouri Fifth District felt more comfortable with the Reverend Cleaver, than with the liberal Metzl.

The race provided insight into cleavages between different Democratic Party factions today. Both candidates relied greatly upon their bases in

the black and Jewish communities. It was the attacks on Metzl as being too liberal which were the foundation of Cleaver's eventual victory. Although, the liberal label itself was rarely used, the voter understood which candidate represented the more socially liberal viewpoint and the more socially conservative. The damage to Metzl's political reputation by using the liberal term was not the result of any particular vocal attacks by Cleaver on Metzl, but instead was the result of what the people of the Fifth District saw. Metzl, was the epitome of the liberal bogeyman presented to voters in 2004. The highly educated, pro-gay rights bachelor, Metzl, was never able to define himself in the face of innuendos and media reports that sought to set him on the far left margins of the Fifth District electorate. The attacks Metzl received for being too liberal were not unique to district level contests. Indeed, within the contentious Democratic presidential primaries, the label of liberal doomed several candidates, and eventually, the party.

STATE AND NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC POLITICS

The Democratic presidential primary race of 2004 closely paralleled the power struggle seen at the Fifth District level. Although it seemed impossible with ten candidates, the Democrats from the outset failed to have a viable spectrum of candidates that represented all facets of the party. Ohio Congressman Dennis Kucinich adequately covered the far left, with such proposals as converting the Department of Defense into the Department of Peace, but on the right, the candidates were relatively weak. Retired General Wesley Clark offered great promise but often jumbled his statements and had questionable credentials within the party, while Senator John Edwards echoed many of the populist themes that resonate in the red states, but had a voting record that made his own reelection chances in North Carolina questionable. Resulting from the demoralizing midterm elections of 2002, where many criticized Democrats for running as "Bush-light" with a relatively weak stable of candidates on the right of the party, the strength of centrist forces in the party yielded to significant challenges from the left.

Howard Dean represented this challenge from the left and represented one of the most dynamic campaigns it had organized in several election cycles. Forces in the party that sought an end to the most current war in Iraq, an extension of partnership rights to homosexual couples, a repeal of the USA PATRIOT Act, and a reassertion of a truly liberal agenda in the Democratic Party coalesced behind Dean. The Dean movement represented a backlash against Democratic submission to Republican Party ideals and dominance after 1994. It blasted the many like Missouri Congressman

Dick Gephardt and Senator John Kerry who had voted to grant the President the power to go to war in Iraq. Furthermore, it represented an underlying backlash to Clinton style acquiescence, in which Democrats failed to gain progress in health care reform, submitted to the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy on gays in the military, and during the Bush Administration, voted to support tax cuts and war. Indeed, Dean upset many Democrats, including a number of Clinton loyalists, such as James Carville who rarely hid his less than supportive feelings of the former governor.

Dean successfully reconfigured the party establishment, at least for the 2004 cycle, but created the cultural modernity that Representative Carson criticized in his editorial following his defeat. Dean successfully pulled the party to the left, which was something many down-ballot candidates like Metzl attempted to follow. The fundamental flaw in this approach was its failure to properly assess the social values held in a number of regions in the national electorate and base constituencies. Campaigning with the backdrop of gay wedding ceremonies in Massachusetts and at the San Francisco City Hall, Dean, and then the Democratic Party that had moved to the left to defeat him, inextricably linked itself to the minority viewpoint in the emerging culture wars of the 2004 election. In nominating Senator Kerry, the party acquired a more agreeable candidate, but also one that would first have to strive to reassure its core on the right, including blacks.

More than Dean before him, Kerry represented the northeastern party’s inability to relate with moderate Democratic constituencies, both black and white. By deemphasizing racial issues, Kerry and the party, much to the chagrin of minority interests, ceded the area of social values issues to Republicans. While this did not significantly hurt minority support thanks to the work of black Democrats across the country, this had a direct impact upon socially conservative Democratic groups targeted with values-based appeals by the Republican Party. Therefore, it was fundamentally racial appeals that kept together the roughly 90 percent black vote for Democrats, yet what Kerry seemingly failed to key upon was that the Democratic Party now lacked any comparable appeal to an already decimated party in the red states.

Missouri in the summer and fall of 2004 represented that Democratic ambivalence. The party still had a very strong base of support, but not enough in recent elections to carry candidates such as Senator Jean Carnahan, former Governor Mel Carnahan’s widow, over the threshold (Mrs. Carnahan was appointed to the seat following her late husband’s posthumous victory over then Senator John Ashcroft). As the primaries developed and the national party seemed controlled by the liberal “Deaniacs,” Democrats were tested by the emergence of the three G’s in state and national politics:

God, guns, and gays. Although both Democratic gubernatorial candidates Governor Bob Holden and State Auditor Claire McCaskill tried to run away from the national party by avoiding answers on their actual views of issues such as same-sex marriage, the national party now had a great effect in defining how the public viewed the party, and thus local Democratic candidates.

The value that “all politics is local” now possessed a new dimension. Not only did the actions of the politicians have repercussions in their home districts, but also the characterization of the party overall had an overriding influence upon their electoral chances. Even though this would seem understandable to most, this phenomenon represents a recurring trend in American politics that was dormant, but redeveloping, during the second half of the 20th century. Although they were the party of McGovern, Mondale, Dukakis, and Jesse Jackson, white Democrats still outnumbered Republicans in southern Congressional delegations by a three to two ratio as late as 1990 (Black 595). The redefinition of American politics since that point has divided America along regional and cultural lines. This is largely due to the success of the GOP through politics, media, and the pulpit in defining clear contrasts in Democratic and Republican “values.” In that current political dynamic, the actual content of these often-mentioned values were made less relevant because one party had clear control over the definition of values. The Democratic Party’s failure to contest, address and define these values for itself is the essence of the Missouri example. The views of Holden and McCaskill on issues like same-sex marriage are largely irrelevant to the administration of state government; however, through the efficacious positioning of ballot and legislative initiatives, Republicans successfully constructed clearly opposing sides to any values question. In Missouri, Republicans were the party that drafted the constitutional amendment banning gay marriage, bills to criminalize embryonic stem-cell research, and measures like the Missouri Infant’s Protection Act that sought to outlaw late-term abortions. Although there was not unanimity within either party for the issues mentioned, the Republicans garnered political advantages for being at the forefront of the rhetoric of social values. As a result, voters clearly knew the position of the GOP, but not the Democratic Party, whose politicians were afraid to offer any answer and had few popular initiatives to discuss.

This type of ambivalence is what plagued Kerry at the national level. Although he was only 100,000 votes from electoral triumph, Kerry’s positioning on key issues typify the challenges Democrats will have to confront to resurrect a winning coalition, particularly in the United States Congress. One of those challenges, demonstrated in the Cleaver-Metzl race, is the

need in the Democratic Party to adequately reflect the interests of minority constituencies. There are several reasons for highlighting this particular challenge. First, dissension along racial lines does tremendous harm to both turnout and fundraising efforts. Second, in the last decade, through their defining of values, Republicans have managed to overturn the claim of the Democratic Party as the "Party of the People." By representing minority groups in populist social appeals more visibly, the party will be able to regain economically liberal, socially conservative whites who cast their votes for President Bush in the most recent election.

These voters served as the key to Cleaver's victory over Metzl. Metzl represented a number of problems that plagued many of his fellow liberal candidates. Primary among them was his inability to gain enough support among minority voters. Although his case was not directly comparable due to his campaign against a black opponent, it does reflect a significant disconnect between black and liberal whites to this day. Only a week before the election, internal polling had Metzl almost tied with Reverend Cleaver in majority white precincts within the district. However, he was losing dramatically in the majority black precincts of Kansas City, known as the Freedom Wards. Another area where Metzl fell short was with white, socially conservative voters in the eastern and southern suburbs of the city. Although this group was the least favorable towards Cleaver, Metzl never seized a racial identification advantage among them due to perceptions that he was socially liberal. White suburbanites typically were disinclined to support Kansas City and their politicians, but the Reverend Cleaver, managed to garner their support.

While Metzl never managed to define himself personally in the face of such attacks, Cleaver successfully ran a campaign that touched upon his inherent social values while also touting issues not related to the values debate. In advertisements that described Cleaver's support of job creation programs and successful initiatives as Mayor, Cleaver provided viewers with pictures of his wife and frequently reminded them of his roles as father and minister. However bright, energetic, and well-funded Metzl might have been, he could not close the values gap in the Missouri Fifth Congressional District. Cleaver spoke of few issues besides the fact that, in his words, people knew who he was. Clearly, this produced an appeal based upon his years of service, but one that also keenly addressed his mainstream appeal in a district that still has a socially conservative orientation. His advertisements and speeches reminded the electorate that he was a well-respected minister, husband, and father. His indeterminate rhetoric surrounding the question of same-sex marriage also provided a clear contrast between Cleaver and his opponent. Metzl campaigned frequently at events sponsored by the

local gay community and had long been on the record as a supporter of gay marriages. Cleaver successfully staked out a more moderate position on same-sex marriage, which was at best, undecided. In every response, he mentioned his role in the church and made a nuanced argument that sought to separate his own views on the issue and the role he thought he could play as a politician. Although Cleaver's position on gay marriage may not have been as lucid as Metzl's, it clearly was more attractive to the Democratic primary electorate. Ironically, like the GOP, Cleaver successfully defined his opponent on values-based appeals. The Cleaver campaign successfully painted Metzl as an out-of-touch liberal, whose background and beliefs that were out of the mainstream of the district. Like many Democrats nationally, Metzl was unable to respond adequately in describing what he knows best – himself.

RESULTS AND IMPLICATIONS

After the most expensive primary contest in the history of the district, Cleaver defeated Metzl by roughly twenty percentage points, carrying the inner-city districts and the majority white suburbs that surrounded Kansas City (Center for Responsive Politics). Not surprisingly, shortly after Cleaver's victory, Kerry made a visit to Kansas City where he rallied with him. While for Cleaver the rally offered little besides a chance to meet the Democratic nominee, for Kerry it represented the opportunity to make a direct appeal to black voters without the worry of addressing his greater struggles with minority constituencies. Kerry, who in the early 1990s had questioned the usefulness of affirmative action on the Senate floor, used Cleaver and Lacy Clay in Missouri, Barack Obama at the Democratic National Convention, and black Democrats nationwide, to achieve what he could not – a significant rapport with a vital voting bloc. While this was a band-aid type solution to a greater problem in the party coalition, his inability to find white conservative Democrats that could serve similar roles in campaigning directly to white, socially conservative constituencies was a key factor in his defeat.

Beyond such reactionary approaches to coalition building or sustaining, the Kerry loss also serves as the impetus behind a potential redefinition of the party coalitions. Figure 2 demonstrates the current party alignments with Democrats in the left column and Republicans in the right. It also further defines cleavages between members of the same parties on social and economic issues.

Figure 2

<p style="text-align: center;">Jamie Metzl Liberal Democrats (economically liberal, socially liberal)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Lincoln Chaffee Rockefeller Republicans GOP Moderates (economically conservative, socially liberal)</p>
<p><i>x – economic policy axis</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Rev. Cleaver Moderate Democrats Minority Voters (economically liberal, socially conservative)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">G.W. Bush Conservative Republicans (economically conservative, socially conservative)</p> <p><i>y – social policy axis</i></p>

Assuming American politics are on two dimensions of social and economic issues as seen in Figure 2, three separate pathways provide clues as to how the Democratic Party could regain control of Congress and the Presidency.

The first is to re-strengthen their absolute support within minority, particularly black and Hispanic communities. That means continuing to win 90 percent or more of the black vote and winning two-thirds or more of the Hispanic vote nationwide. At the same time, they must also lose no additional white voters. The hazard in this approach is that it gives too little credit to the continuation of racial politics and ignores the potential exodus of the remaining Democratic white and affluent voters, already a tenuous collection. This approach will also largely represent the status quo with Democrats remaining unclear and strongly divided on values-based issues in every election cycle.

Another option is for the party to abandon its populist base, which some deride as “class-warfare” already and seek to siphon the votes of well-to-do socially liberal, economic conservatives away from the GOP. Northeastern Republicans largely represent this group, better known as Rockefeller Republicans. Particularly in Congress, legislators like Lincoln Chafee and Arlen Specter will undergo serious challenges in the administration ahead as they seek to work with their colleagues in the GOP caucus, but also try

to protect socially liberal issues such as abortion. In the near future, this choice would seem to have few setbacks. With a strong black and Hispanic voting record with Democrats in most elections, it is highly doubtful that they would leave in large enough numbers at the onset of such party appeals. As the slow reformation of southern politics following the Civil Rights Movement has shown, reassessing partisan identification is a slow process. Unfortunately, for minorities, this appeal by Democrats would be the least beneficial for minority interests in areas such as urban redevelopment, affirmative action, job creation, education, and immigration. Besides its apparent unfairness to loyal Democratic constituencies, the drawback of this approach would be that it would force the party to represent the antithesis of many of its long-held core beliefs. Although there have been many disparate faces of the party throughout its history, populism survives as the sole link between such seemingly opposing figures as Andrew Jackson and Al Sharpton.

The third and most practical option would be for the party to redefine the values discussed in American politics. Of course, events that can cause realignment are not under any party's control. What is under a party's control is the grassroots-level support that can serve as the basis for a party's resurgence, such as the role played by the Christian Coalition on behalf on the GOP. It is in this regard that the Reverend Cleaver managed to survive in the general election against a better-funded challenger. Using the influence of Cleaver's parishioners, supportive labor unions, and the support of the black community, as well as an ability to redefine values in economic and quality-of-life terms against a Republican millionaire, the Democratic Party successfully saved a seat in a district that could have become a toss-up.

The many races of 2004 highlighted several areas for concern that, left unresolved, will continue to plague the Democratic Party. Racial and ethno-religious conflicts, like those seen in the Cleaver-Metzl race, created an unreasonable coalition that can weaken chances for victories in general elections. For that reason, Howard Dean's leadership of the Democratic National Committee should be intriguing. It will be interesting to note whether the party will coalesce behind the new leader or whether the discomfort exhibited by top Democrats like James Carville during Howard Dean's time as the primary frontrunner will demonstrate continued ambivalence and opposition in the national rhetoric of the party. Additionally, one may see whether the party takes lessons from loss, such as the need to retool and strengthen party coalitions and take control of social values rhetoric.

As critics from the right and within, such as Representative Carson,

attack the Democratic Party for embracing a cultural struggle from the left that alienates entire regions of voters, candidates like Cleaver prove the key to success is not in reasserting liberal mores, but in having voices that can speak to all constituencies within their districts. The dilemma before the Democratic Party today is whether it will allow socially moderate black leaders, like Cleaver, with a record of winning in socially moderate districts, play a role in the reformation of the party, or if it will continue to marginalize the socially conservative minorities and whites within their party.

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