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Desperate Democrats In The Reagan Revolution: A Party Determined To Win The White House

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DESPERATE DEMOCRATS IN THE REAGAN REVOLUTION: A PARTY DETERMINED TO WIN THE WHITE HOUSE

by

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Abstract

Bill Clinton's 1992 election to the presidency as a Democrat ended a series of defeats for that party on the presidential level. Clinton may have won the White House, but he did not do it alone. In the decade before his victory, the "New Democrats" worked to moderate the Democratic Party from within, responding to the presidential losses of 1980, 1984, and 1988. Scholars have explored this topic from many angles, but none have explored it from the perspective of these "New Democrats" in a way that traces their story from Al From and Gillis Long to the DLC and finally to Clinton with an overarching focus on loss. This independent study employs a discourse analysis of various speeches and policy manifestos in the 1980s to study how this group reacted to Democratic presidential losses. The study ultimately concludes that "New Democrats" pressured the party to moderate key policy positions as a direct result of election losses on the presidential level. In the wake of growing calls to reform a party that is still largely dominated by "New Democrats", this project is more relevant than ever.

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Acknowledgements:

To my parents, who work endlessly for our family and taught me to persevere through adversity

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To Al From, Bill Clinton, and the other 'New Democrats' for their political determination; you are an inspiration for the next generation, though not in the way you might expect

Introduction

By 1980, the Democratic Party had lost the plot. Soon, they would painfully realize that they had also lost the American people. For half a century, Democrats had relied on the New Deal paradigm. The most powerful idea in this paradigm was that an active government could protect its people from the excesses of capitalism, focusing on the "haves versus have-nots".[1] By the 1980s, new issues had risen into the national consciousness. Now, crime, abortion, and gun control, among other social issues, rose to the forefront of political debates. On economics, Republicans accused Democrats of being out of touch, pointing to 'Stagflation' and byzantine regulations as proof of their failures. Ronald Reagan's 1981 proclamation that "government is not the solution to our problem, government is the problem" struck a powerful chord with voters.[2] It became clear that the New Deal political framework was under threat, but the final blow would come from Democrats, not Republicans.

In the wake of Democratic electoral losses on the presidential level in 1980, 1984, and 1988, the Democratic Party took a 'moderate' turn. Many prominent Democrats, largely led by Southern Democratic governors, viewed ideological alienation from moderate voters as the cause of their woes. This faction of the party resolved to fundamentally change their appeals to moderate voters to help win future elections. Specifically, New Democrats, as they were called, would try to win back previously loyal Democrats who had recently voted Republican in presidential elections. For the most part, such voters were white and blue-collar, and had left the party when they believed it was too liberal for them in the 1960s and 1970s.[3] They saw a party

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[1] Nicol C. Rae, *Southern Democrats* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 14.
[2] Ronald Reagan, "Inaugural Address," Inaugural Address | The Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation & Institute.
[3] Rae, *Southern Democrats*, 21.

that had abandoned them in favor of "special interests" which typically included disadvantaged racial and economic groups.[4] These efforts signaled a shift in the identity of the Democratic Party from the New Deal coalition that had existed for decades to the creation of a centrist 'New Democrat' coalition. Evidence of this can be seen in a variety of speeches about the state of the party and other party paraphernalia in the late 1980s, which demonstrate why some Democrats believed this direction was fundamentally necessary for the party's success in future elections.

As Southern Democrats agonized over losses, a new generation of business and technology-minded Democrats rose to prominence elsewhere. This "neoliberal" faction in the Democratic Party was not organized in the way the Southern Democrats were, but many of them also focused their efforts on finding a way to beat the Republicans. To do so, this emerging faction advocated policies like free trade, deregulation, lower taxes, and cuts to the welfare state. Beyond the neoliberal focus on technology, the neoliberals largely agreed with Southern Democrats in their goals in moderating the party, but the term neoliberal applied to those calling for moderation outside the South. The so-called New Democrats rose from Southern Democrats and a few of these neoliberals, and their overarching goal was promoting moderation as the solution to electoral loss. As a very loose coalition that included members of both groups, the New Democrats was not organized around one group necessarily. Rather, it was a group of like-minded Democrats that sought to win back groups they had lost to Republicans in previous decades. More than anything, they wanted to protect their seats and win the White House.

Indeed, with every loss, Democrats in vulnerable seats nationwide grew increasingly concerned that the national party was out of step with the American people. When a group of concerned Democrats in the South issued the "New Orleans Declaration" in 1990, they officially

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[4] Rae, *Southern Democrats*, 52.

earned the title "New Democrats." The declaration called for a Democratic shift towards moderation (which, to them, was about embracing the same issues neoliberals advocated). Long before journalists coined the term "New Democrats," however, the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) was fighting to change the party. Democratic strategist Al From founded that group in response to the Republican landslide in 1984. Since he had recently lost longtime ally and moderate Louisiana Democrat Gillis Long, he hoped he could bring together a new set of like-minded officials and politicians to reverse Democratic fortunes through the DLC. This independent study follows these transformative efforts through the 1980s and early 1990s, pondering the importance of election losses in these changes, as Democrats shed their New Deal skin and grew into something new.

By investigating the electoral losses the Democrats endured in the 1980s, I hope to understand the mindset of the modern party, which in many ways echoes the party it became in the 1990s. The analysis, however, has a second purpose, because it can also help readers better understand the current infighting within the party. Current infighting is similar to the conflicts that took place in the Democratic Party in the 1980s. In the 1980s, the New Democrats challenged the New Deal paradigm as strongly as they challenged the New Liberals, who had risen in the 1960s and 1970s. These two groups dominated the party in the 1980s. In a repudiation of both, New Democrats called for more business-friendly policies that were a blow to New Dealers and turned a blind eye to racial minorities, which angered New Liberals. History is not static, and New Democrats should have expected a new force to challenge them, just as they challenged the factions of their day. However, current party leaders did not foresee this occurring. Today, New Democrats and their successors, figures like Joe Biden and Nancy Pelosi, face a new generation of determined opposition in a progressive direction. Though this is a fairly

recent development, Democratic progressives are quickly growing in number and strength. They pose the largest threat the New Democratic establishment has seen in decades. Those who once led the party of Roosevelt to change so drastically in a short period evidently did not anticipate the same fate eventually befalling their own faction of the party. As such, party infighting has only grown in recent years, as the party establishment bitterly resists the new generation.

The implications of this history on the modern Democratic Party are more important than ever. With issues of climate change and economic inequality around every corner, the question of who has power in the Democratic Party, one of America's two main political parties, will remain relevant. In 2022, many leading Democrats are fundamentally neoliberal in nature, or at least began their careers this way. Such careers began in the 1980s, when they were considered 'New Democrats'. One of them is the sitting U.S. president, Joe Biden. Others, like Nancy Pelosi, run Congress with views that "align" with the 'New Democrats'.[5] The irony in modern politics is that these old political revolutionaries are now the face of the party, and they face the same transformational efforts they engaged in forty years ago. These challengers, known as progressives, hope to inspire a leftward shift in the party. As recently as 2016, Hillary Clinton, the wife of the quintessential American neoliberal president, ran for president herself. Her platform was not a pure continuation of New Democratic ideology, but it did show the continued influence of such groups on our politics because of her similar positions promoting free trade and a generally business-friendly policy. However, progressive pressure in the primary inspired her to change some of her rhetoric to better fit their desires. Evidently, this is not the party it was thirty years ago.

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[5] Tara Golshan, Arthur Delaney, and Daniel Marans, "Progressives Resist Nancy Pelosi's Plan for 'Fewer Things' in Budget Bill," HuffPost (HuffPost, October 12, 2021).

In studying this topic, the project will include three case studies, which are the presidential elections of 1980, 1984, and 1988. These cases were selected because of their relevance to the Democratic transformation. Importantly, they are consecutive losses, allowing me to measure their progressive impacts. For each case study, I will employ a discourse analysis, in which there will be certain themes like economic growth or crime that I expect to locate within various speeches, documents, and manifestos from the 1980s and 1990s.

An interdisciplinary approach to understanding the metamorphosis of the Democratic Party yields a fuller picture of how the party became what it is today. For political scientists, the "fundamentals" are crucial. These include public opinion, the health and stewardship of the economy, and other measures that they believe predict a candidate's success.[6] Political scientists, using metrics such as public opinion and the health and stewardship of the economy, largely attributed the changes in the Democratic Party during this period to Bill Clinton. They believe Clinton's 1992 election was a demonstration of the fundamentals. He portrayed himself as the well-spoken and polished savior of an ailing economy, thus leading to his victory.[7] In contrast, the historian's approach to this topic is largely focused on creating long-term narratives. Instead of focusing on electoral loss, they discuss the dynamic culture wars that characterized much of the 1980s and 1990s. Taken together, neither approach focuses heavily on the seemingly acknowledged (yet understudied) connection between Democratic electoral losses at the presidential level in this period and their subsequent transformations. This project will first examine this gap in literature and identify different schools and arguments as they exist today. In

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[6] James Campbell, "The Fundamentals in US Presidential Elections: Public Opinion, the Economy and Incumbency in the 2004 Presidential Election," University of Buffalo (Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties, April 2005).
[7] Rae, *Southern Democrats*, 146.

this process, I hope to connect the dots between loss and transformation in a way that has not been done before on this subject.

To help readers understand the topic, this independent study will first transition to a discussion of the major literature regarding my topic. This means it will include discussions of Democratic losses on the presidential level in the 1980s, from numerous angles. The first chapter will synthesize these arguments and attempt to categorize them into different schools of thought. As with the rest of the project, the sources I draw on are interdisciplinary, as both historians and political scientists, among others, have their input. The analysis in the chapter will include a broader discussion of the various schools in the literature, whether they be the Clinton focused school that political scientists largely adhere to, the narrative social-issue focused school that historians prefer, or the loss-focused narrative school I identify with. Then, the project includes a discussion of the three main case studies it analyzes, in which I will describe the major literature within each.

Chapter One: Regarding Reform: Clinton or Culture Wars?

This chapter is a wider consideration of the dominant schools regarding the changes in the Democratic Party in the 1980s and 1990s. As this project is interdisciplinary in nature, it will incorporate sources from various fields to tease out the arguments they make and locate gaps in the scholarship. I focus on the three major schools in the literature. The first school, based in political science literature, uses the Bill Clinton Comeback Kid theory, in which scholars espouse their belief in Clinton's primary role in transforming the Democratic Party. The next school, involving scholarship from historians, uses the Culture Wars theory, in which scholars create narratives about the driving role of social issues in the 'moderating' direction the Democrats took in the 1980s. Finally, the school I identify with the most uses the Power of Narratives theory, in which scholars take a holistic view of the 1980s and the trends within to explain the Democratic metamorphosis. They do not create narratives as much as historians may, nor do they rely on fundamentals as political scientists would. Instead, they analyze the narratives of politicians about the fundamentals. After the discussion of the major schools, the chapter will proceed with an analysis of the dominant arguments surrounding each case study included in the Independent Study. This will include the 1980, 1984, and 1988 elections. In doing so, it will set the stage for the rest of the project, creating a foundation of knowledge that the project seeks to build from.

Bill Clinton: The Democrats' Comeback Kid

In this school of thought, it is Bill Clinton's star power and how this factor was the most important in changing the identity of the Democratic Party, though perhaps not the only one. Not only was Clinton a star, he also used clever strategies to first win over his party and then the

country. This literature does not look at a wide time period so much as it focuses more on the

early 1990s, i.e., the heyday of the DLC and Bill Clinton. Michael Nelson, writing about Bill

Clinton's elections in his work fittingly titled *Clinton's Elections: 1992, 1996, and the Birth of a*

New Era of Governance, discusses the pivotal role of Clinton in taking back the White House for

the Democrats. As Clinton was the U.S. president, his political rise and involvement with plans

to stage a Southern Democratic takeover of the party has been much studied, and given

significant importance.[1] Political scientists Ravi Roy and Thomas Rochon agree with other

scholars in the school when they note that Clinton ushered in the first persuasive response to the

resurgent and triumphant Republican Party. For them, it was only with Clinton's help, and the

DLC's commitment to generally putting market forces, fiscal responsibility, and the middle-class

in the forefront, that the Democrats could win again.[2]

The strategies Clinton used to win certainly involved the above policies of the DNC, but

it was also a personal co-optation of the policies Republicans had embraced and used to win. As

oral historian Russell Riley argues, it was Reagan's themes of law and order, welfare reform, and

individualism that Clinton successfully used in his efforts to win back Americans for the

Democrats.[3] It is this willingness to embrace policies previously mostly held by Republicans that

allowed Clinton to win over his opponents. For example, Clinton embraced the death penalty.

Michael Dukakis, the Democratic standard bearer four years earlier, refused to do so out of

practical considerations. For historian Patrick Maney, it was not simply that Clinton was

charismatic or young. Rather, it was Clinton's ideological flexibility, his willingness to go toe-to-

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[1] Michael Nelson, *Clinton's Elections: 1992, 1996, and the Birth of a New Era of Governance* (University Press of Kansas, 2020), 137.
[2] Thomas R. Rochon and Ravi Roy, "Adaptation of the American Democratic Party in an Era of Globalization," *International Journal of Political Economy* 31, no. 3 (December 8, 2014), 22.
[3] Russell L. Riley, *Inside the Clinton White House: An Oral History* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

toe with Republicans, and his ability to weather the storm of media attention that allowed him to win.[4] According to this school, the Clinton campaign and administration, rather than the Democratic Party, created winning narratives and strategies. They were able to win back disaffected Democrats that had gone to the other side, at least according to polling data.[5]

This approach to the issue of electoral losses on the presidential level is lacking for a few reasons. Bill Clinton was far from the first Democrat to use appeals to 'moderates' in the 1980s and 1990s to win votes. Michael Dukakis did it first, and though he lost, the Democratic Party continued its shift to the right.[6] Even those in the scholarship who often accentuate Clinton's role in the Democratic metamorphosis admit that it only came after several successive Democratic losses, and hence, a series of previous attempts to fix the party's problems. Michael Nelson, a political scientist who specifically wrote about Bill Clinton, admitted that Clinton, for all his talent, was in the shadow of his party's four previous presidential-level losses since 1968.[7] In this school of thought, Nelson and others focus on Clinton's accomplishments above all else, and yet gaps remain in their arguments. Who are the founders of the DLC, and how did Clinton factor into its early years? Was the DLC the only organization tackling this issue? And why should Clinton be the main focus of this history if the moderate turn began before Americans knew Clinton on a national level?

I have largely distanced myself from this school. Yes, Bill Clinton was a major figure in the history of the DLC, but his decision to enter the 1992 presidential race did not signify a change in the party's identity. Instead, this was a trend that had been happening for some time, as

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[4] Patrick J. Maney, *Bill Clinton: New Gilded Age President* (University Press of Kansas, 2016), 21.
[5] Rochon and Roy, "Adaptation of the American Democratic Party", 25.
[6] Leo P. Ribuffo, "From Carter to Clinton: The Latest Crisis of American Liberalism," *American Studies International* 35, no. 2 (June 1997), 14.
[7] Nelson, *Clinton's Elections,* 117.

many scholars in the wider school will argue. I anticipate that I will find evidence of this longer-term transformation in the various speeches of Southern governors and other politicians. These politicians were worried about alienating their voters, which would then lead to them losing their races. One of these men was Bill Clinton, but it is important to note that this was Clinton before his presidential run, when he was one of many election-anxious Southern politicians seeking to reform the party.

The Culture War: Liberalism Drives Voters Away

In this framework, which is largely dominated by historians, the explanation for the 'moderation' of the party is placed onto social issues. Discussions of such issues can vary depending on the author, though they often take place in the form of discussion about gender, race, and LGBTQ rights. Why were these issues pertinent in this period specifically? Historian Jill Lepore answers this question in her ambitious work *These Truths*, and she addresses the process of the Republican Party outflanking the Democratic Party. Beginning in the 1970s, as the fights for the Equal Rights Amendment and the movement for Black Power shook the very core of traditional American life, conservatives struck back. Indeed, when they looked at the state of the country, they saw a "war of ideology...a war of ideas...a war about our way of life", as Republican strategist Paul Weyrich phrased it.[8] As the Republican Party was slowly enveloped by its new conservative wing, a faction whose creation was masterminded by the likes of Pat Buchanan and Phyllis Schlafly, the Democrats struggled to keep up with the dynamism of the new Republicans. Specifically, they struggled to compete with Republicans on issues of gender, race, and even technology. Thus, Democrats fell short on both issues of policy and technique.

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[8] Jill Lepore, *These Truths: A History of the United States* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2019), 648.

As computer technology began to revolutionize information, the Republicans were the first to take advantage of it. They acquired a computer mainframe in 1977 and used television, telephone marketing, and mailing techniques to win voters in never-tried-before, but, as it would turn out, extremely successful approaches. One example of this success is that the Republicans had identified an estimated 4,000,000 contributors, while the Democrats only had an estimated 1,500,000. Therefore, they were able to pursue a better voter outreach campaign and ultimately spread their message.[9] As the Republicans, using new technologies, framed Democratic positions on issues ranging from abortion to gun rights as extreme and threatening to traditional family life, they successfully drove voters away from the party, as historians like Jill Lepore argue. As partisanship increased and both sides drew battle lines, it became clear that the Democrats were poorly prepared for what was to come. Even Bill Clinton himself, with his famous "it's the economy stupid", found it nearly impossible to pull voters away from their focus on social issues.[10]

Scholars of American history, such as Jill Lepore and Robert O. Self, while giving large surveys of American history, each added their own unique perspectives on the narrative of Democrats in the final quarter of the twentieth century. Jill Lepore, in her project of surveying American history within one book, is able to discuss the Republican plans to outflank Democrats and ultimately shut the latter party out of the White House for over a decade.[11] These actions would later contribute to a shift in the Democratic Party.[12] It is in this period that we can see the transformation of the Democratic Party, from one focused on the power of labor to the power of

[9] Lepore, *These Truths*, 666.
[10] Lepore, *These Truths*, 648.
[11] Lepore, *These Truths*, 664.
[12] Lepore, *These Truths*, 694.

knowledge, women, and minorities.[13] Historian Robert Self makes a similar argument to Lepore,

arguing that in the 1980s, the Democrats perceived themselves as losing the 'Culture Wars'.

Specifically, this involved a perception that the mainstream American voter felt alienated from

them, as if the party had become too extreme in its positions in terms of social issues. Whether

they based it on actual data or not, the 'New Democrats' led by Gillis Long and Al From, among

others, blamed this alienation for their losses. They viewed the socially liberal activists who had

mostly taken over the party during the McGovern-Fraser Commission, like Jesse Jackson or the

Students for a Democratic Society, as too radical.[14] Due to this activist influence on social issues,

Self argues that winning the White House again required the Democrats to undergo what they

perceived as a 'moderation' of their stances. As a result, gay rights and the rights of minorities

suffered due to 'Democratic moderation'.[15] Democrats designed moderate policies for a reason.

It was because moderation was designed to regain the "breadwinner narrative" Self discusses.

This so-called breadwinner narrative entailed both major political parties fighting for control of

narratives around protecting the nuclear family. It meant protecting an envisioned nuclear family

with a heterosexual male paternal figure who made money for his family. For Democrats, the

breadwinner narrative was about extending the nuclear family to all classes of society. For

Republicans, who took over the narrative by the 1980s and 1990s, it meant protecting the family

from moral deviants, such as anyone who challenged the traditional nuclear family. Democrats

had lost the breadwinner narrative to Republicans in this era, and they sought to gain it back.[16]

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[13] Lepore, *These Truths*, 693.
[14] Lepore, *These Truths*, 69.
[15] Robert O. Self, in *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy since the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang a division of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), 412.
[16] Self, *All in the Family*, 4.

The Culture Wars school is a social-issue and narrative oriented school. These scholars, usually historians, talk about an all-out war over the soul of America, a conflict scholars say the Democrats were losing. The takeaway lesson Democrats took from these losses was that they had lost the plot, that they had focused so much on women, minorities, and the young that they had lost their old constituencies of white men, especially in the South. In discussing these developments, Republicans, some Democrats, and once in a while, the media, helped spread a national political narrative that said Democrats were out of touch with voters because they were too liberal. Whether this was true or not, Democrats, at least, believed that was the case, and so it caused the party to undergo a shift in its identity. This was a narrative that lasted over a decade.[17] These historians argue that it is social issues themselves, and their presence of Democrats as a party outside the American mainstream on issues such as feminism, abortion, and guns, that had caused their losses, and also necessitated moderation. The losses, for them, were only a side effect of their perceived extremism on social and family issues.

Though this school of thought offers a critical and comprehensive perspective on American political history in the 1970s and 80s, it might miss the point. Rather than focusing on creating a narrative that fits a period of history, as historians do, perhaps it is better to analyze the narratives the politicians come up with themselves. For example, while social issues were driving factors behind the change in the Democratic Party, few Democrats would personally argue for a complete revolution in the party were it not for electoral losses. After all, Southern Democrats and Democrats elsewhere were able to coexist in the party for years. It was only when the ideological distance between factions of the party, in particular those who identified themselves as "moderate" and those identifying as more "liberal", caused losses that the party

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[17] Lepore, *These Truths*, 693.

experienced serious internal conflict over the soul of the party. Starting in the 1966 midterms and continuing into the 1970s and 80s, the process of a conservative resurgence forced Democrats to reassess their appeals to voters. Yet, it seems their losses to Republicans exacerbated their identity crisis, which had begun in the face of internal disunity and a resurgent Republican Party. In a certain sense, this pushed them in a 'moderate direction'. This narrative does not adequately address the impact of electoral losses, a line of argument I seek to explore in this paper.[18]

The Power of Narratives

These scholars are primarily concerned with the Democratic Party's ideological shift away from the New Deal paradigm and towards a more 'moderate' framework in the 1980s and 1990s. A word on the term moderate: political scientist Nicol Rae defines these moderates as those who sought to play down ideology and focus on a technocratic approach to government, advocate positions such as free trade, conservative positions on morality, and tax cuts for the Middle Class. The ideological shift mentioned above is specifically seen in the party's shifting self-talk about winning. Here, the dominant narrative became that Democrats drifted too far from the mainstream and had to moderate, which differed from previous narratives that were not as concerned with a move towards moderation. This was also seen in real-policy terms, in the sense that prominent Democrats, like those who would join the DLC, pushed the rest of the party to advocate policies they saw as more 'moderate'. Some examples of policies that the DLC advocated are crime deterrence through any means necessary, employee stock ownership, free trade policies, and "restoring progressivity to the tax code". Overall, the general theme the 'moderates' wanted to portray for the Democratic Party united these policies; they were the party

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[18] Lepore, *These Truths*, 627.

of opportunity, not government.[19] There are many forms for this need for moderation and the shift away from activist fundamentalism. Rae addresses the Democratic Leadership Council's portrayal of itself as a savior for the party, as the only faction that could lead Democrats to victory in future presidential elections. This analysis demonstrates the fluid state of factions within the Democratic Party, which had become a patchwork of bickering factions by the late 1980s, according to Rae.[20] While the DLC was rising, however, so too were other factions. According to Patrick Andelic, the author of *Donkey Work: Congressional Democrats in Conservative America*, there were many other reform factions competing for control of the Democratic Party, with most hoping to 'moderate' the party and make it more like the Republican party policy-wise.

This 'moderation' meant being pro-growth, pro-business, and anti-ideology.[21] Paul Tsongas, who challenged the DLC in some respects as another more moderate individual wishing to reform the party, led one such faction of moderates.[22] The argument about factions goes beyond their mere existence, however; however. Scholars in this school are also concerned about how factions interact in the party. In Seth Masket's work *Learning From Loss: The Democrats 2016-2020*, Masket discusses the factions competing for control of the Democratic Party in 2016 and 2020, and one aspect of this battle is through narratives. According to this part of the scholarship, it is not so much one man or woman who changes the party after an election loss, but rather the narratives about *why* the party lost. These narratives will often vary immediately after an election, but the party will eventually coalesce around one or two in each

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[19] Rae, *Southern Democrats*, 118.
[20] Rae, *Southern Democrats*, 20.
[21] Patrick Andelic, *Donkey Work: Congressional Democrats in Conservative America, 1974-1994* (University Press of Kansas, 2019), 156.
[22] Andelic, *Donkey Work*, 151.

instance of an electoral loss. This in turn allows the party to create prescriptions for how to win the next election.[23] However, Masket is not only concerned with narratives following 2016; he also mentions those in the 1980s. It is in this that we see that he belongs with the other scholars in the school, for it is not the 1992 version of Bill Clinton who he credits (or blames) for the rise of the 'New Democrats'. Instead, Masket discusses the narratives Southern Democrats concocted after losses in the 1980s, including those from a younger Bill Clinton.[24] As scholar Leo Ribuffo notes, this crisis in the party's identity is the culmination of years of Democratic voters actually abandoning the party, and the reality of those losses. DLC founder Al From argued, for example, that any victory would require repudiation of those who really controlled the party; labor and the feminist "bosses".[25] Together, these scholars weave a narrative of their own, illustrating a party undergoing a fundamental identity crisis in the aftermath of devastating failures on the presidential level.

My analysis largely fits within this school of thought, because it addresses a changing Democratic Party years before Bill Clinton had risen to become its star. The formative years of the 'New Democrats' were the mid 1980s, in the wake of two back-to-back presidential election losses for the Democrats. I hope to demonstrate in this work that this is no coincidence; that the electoral losses directly affected how the party saw itself, how Democratic politicians interacted with one another and the Republicans, and how it grew into what it became in the 1990s. Starting with the Coalition for a Democratic Majority in the 1970s and culminating in the Democratic Leadership Council's dominance in the party, a decades-long process of reflection and change followed the challenges Democrats faced in winning the White House in this period. A CDM

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[23] Seth E. Masket, in *Learning from Loss the Democrats, 2016-2020* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 93.
[24] Masket, *Learning From Loss*, 130.
[25] Ribuffo, "From Carter to Clinton", 13.

newspaper wastes no time lamenting the loss of the "blue-collar, Southern moderate, Catholic,

and "middle American" voters who deserted the Democratic ticket in 1972".[26] There is no doubt

that the party's relative ideological isolation to the rest of the American people, whether it was a

rift that truly existed or the party imagined it, had a great impact on how it behaved moving

forward.

In the next section, I will delve more deeply into the literature on each of my case studies.

As one might expect, the arguments made about each election largely depend on the

circumstances involving that contest, so it is necessary to discuss the available literature on each

one in depth with perspectives from political scientists and historians. Collectively, they try to

make sense of how Democrats lost, how they reacted to these losses, and how those outcomes

impacted the party moving forward. In discussing the theories and explanations around

Democratic loss, I will set the stage for chapter two, in which I will discuss the methodology of

my project.

1980: Ailing Democrats in a New America

Scholars cite a variety of causes when they discuss the Democratic Party's loss in the

1980 election, but most argue that frays in the party had begun to form. According to historian

Robert Self, it was Jimmy Carter's questionable relationship with feminists that cost him the

White House. Meanwhile, political experts such as Kenneth S. Baer argued that the Democrats

had struggled between catering to the older New Deal faction and the newer 'New Liberal' or

'New Left' coalition in the party. The former included the white working class. This latter group,

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[26] Masket, *Learning From Loss*, 130.

by contrast, included black militants, feminists, civil rights leaders, the LGBTQ community, unions, and people on welfare.[27]

The year 1980 is one that many scholars, chiefly Kenneth Baer, identify as a starting point for the major founding figures of the DLC or other centrist-leaning insurgency groups within the Democratic Party. Baer uses his connections to Democratic Party figures to interview many of its major figures. This may have biased him in a way, as he mostly received the 'New Democratic' viewpoint in his interviews. One of these men was Al From, a future founder of the Democratic Leadership Council, and, at this point, a senior staffer to the Carter administration.[28] Like many in the party, From found himself "disappointed" in the results of the 1972 election, when the liberal George McGovern was thoroughly beaten. When Carter experienced dismal results in the 1980 contest, it became clear to From, at least, that change needed to occur. He wasn't alone in this sentiment. Reform efforts would be prominent among Democratic governors in the mid-1980s, but one early ally of Al From was Gillis Long. The powerful congressman hailed from the decorated Long dynasty in Louisiana, though he differed from his predecessors in his 'moderate' identification.[29]

As Baer and other scholars argue, especially in the wider school, the arguments around Democratic Party decline began to form between 1981 and 1984. There was a sense that the New Deal coalition was falling apart, and that only an adaptation of the party to the new era, not unlike the one the Republicans had gone through, could save it. Many of the men who would later form the DLC would be among those holding these sentiments. As mentioned before, many of these men would later become governors, but they started in the House of Representatives.

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[27] Kenneth S. Baer, *Reinventing Democrats: The Politics of Liberalism from Reagan to Clinton* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 35.
[28] Baer, *Reinventing Democrats*, 36.
[29] Baer, *Reinventing Democrats*, 38.

Among them, Al Gore, Richard 'Dick' Gephardt, and Tim Wirth of Colorado were some of the key members. Years before the DLC, they founded an organization called the "House Democratic Caucus's Committee on Party Effectiveness", otherwise known as the CPE.[30] Another part of this organization was the National House Democratic Caucus (NHDC), formed in 1983 to further promote moderate reforms in the party. The NHDC differed from its CPE predecessor in that it allowed donations and private funds because of its independent nature.[31] This was not yet the cohesive force that took over the party in 1992, but it was the beginning of a faction of dissidents to the mainstream Democratic faction that professed liberalism and at least some loyalty to the New Deal legacy. While scholars somewhat debate Long's role in all this, another rising star in the Democratic Party was just getting his start in this period, though his star would soon outshine all others in the party.

When Bill Clinton campaigned for Jimmy Carter in 1976, he failed to predict that Carter would be the cause of many headaches for the young politician. Scholars, especially in the Clinton school, say it was local factors such as powerful business interests, a weak governorship, and a long drought that drove Clinton's first term as governor of Arkansas into the ground.[32] For Clinton, losing the office of governor was more than just a setback; it was a near-death experience. The lessons he took from this loss were, among others, that he was too liberal in his original time in office. This lesson in particular would have a powerful influence on Clinton's career, and set him on a collision course with the likes of Al From.[33]

Clinton, like many other Southern Democrats, had observed that the national party did not necessarily align with the interests of voters in his state. In the wake of the McGovern-Fraser

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[30] Baer, *Reinventing Democrats*, 39.
[31] Baer, *Reinventing Democrats*, 45.
[32] Maney, *Bill Clinton,* 24.
[33] Maney, *Bill Clinton,* 25.

reforms of the 1970s, many disaffected Democratic officials like Gillis Long believed that fringe

interests and activists had taken over the party, and that party officials needed to take power

back. These Democrats, specifically the aforementioned CPE, decided to take action.[34] To this

end, the CPE took advantage of the committee founded after the 1980 election to assess what had

gone wrong with the party in that year. It is a tradition for political parties to create committees

or commissions to assess electoral losses. The McGovern-Fraser Commission did it after 1972,

the Republicans would write an autopsy report after a disastrous 2012 election, and the

Democrats had another commission after their loss in 2016.[35] After the disappointing 1980

result, North Carolina Governor James B. Hunt Jr. headed a commission to try and diagnose the

problems within the party. The CPE, led by Long and From, took great interest in this

commission, as it provided a chance to rewrite party rules in their favor. In the end, Democrats

drafted a plan to create a system of "superdelegates" to give elected officials more control over

party affairs during party primaries.[36] From hoped that this would force presidential nominees to

listen to elected officials more, but before 1984, they had little influence in party affairs, even

after the Hunt Commission.

For scholars, 1968 was where cracks formed in the New Deal coalition, but if that was

the case, then 1980 was when the cracks became a gaping hole. It was apparent that the fracture

in the party was an electoral liability, and, worse, that it was here to stay. Not all of the changes

were negative; Carter won women by 8 points over Reagan in the 1980 election.[37] Nevertheless,

as many scholars agree, Democrats found it difficult to escape the Republican portrayal of the

party as out-of-touch and beholden to special interest groups. Increasingly, the party turned from

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[34] Baer, *Reinventing Democrats*, 46.
[35] Masket, *Learning From Loss*, 43.
[36] Baer, *Reinventing Democrats*, 49.
[37] Lepore, *These Truths*, 668.

its old coalition of labor and the white working class towards those who they identified as the "knowledge workers". This group included engineers, scientists, computer workers, and more. Other than this group, the Democrats also appealed to (and leaned more heavily on) women, minorities, and the young.[38]

This "knowledge wing" of the party was not always the same as the aforementioned Southern Democrats. Some, like Paul Tsongas, were from Massachusetts, which became a hotbed for the sort of technocratic rhetoric that would later characterize the party. Prominent centrist Gary Hart would somewhat merge the two factions into a group called the "Atari Democrats". These Democrats contrasted themselves with Eleanor Roosevelt, who they had significant disdain for, as well as Jesse Jackson, who they saw as a radical proponent of racial and social interest groups. Instead, these Democrats believe they were hip and in the know about technology, the future, and most of all, everything Democrats needed to beat the Republican Party.[39] Outside of Massachusetts and Colorado, though, many other cities and states enjoyed a dramatic rise in the sorts of voters the Democrats started shifting towards in the early 1980s. New York, Atlanta, Boulder, Seattle, Madison, and Austin were all very different cities. But, according to scholars, they all had a growing number of liberals in the "knowledge class" who supported campaigns ranging from McGovern in 1972 to Hart in 1988.[40]

As From, Long, Clinton, and others looked on with dismay at Carter's loss to conservative standard bearer Ronald Reagan in 1980, they could not help but admire the 'Reagan Revolution'. Far from underestimating Republicans, as Carter had perhaps done, though, From feared a complete political realignment in America if the party lost again in 1984.[41] Though they

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[38] Lepore, *These Truths*, 693.
[39] Lepore, *These Truths*, 696.
[40] Lepore, *These Truths*, 694.
[41] Baer, *Reinventing Democrats*, 51.

had done little to make their dissenting voices heard within a party still largely controlled by aging New Dealists and New Left activists, they had set themselves up as an alternative if the party experienced further disappointments in future elections. The all-important game of narratives was one in which From and his associates excelled. After 1980 and 1984, they began to influence party narratives after loss, which blamed the result on party liberalism and its commitment to fringe groups that did not represent the national interest.[42]

1984: A Democratic Disappointment

In analyzing the 1984 election as a case study, scholars generally agree about the implications of that year's race, including the impact it had on the Democratic Party. This election is widely seen as a landslide for the Republican Party, and it represented the second time in a row that the Democrats had lost in their contest for the White House. The harsh reality of their loss, especially the magnitude of it, had an outsize impact on many prominent figures within the party, particularly Southern Democrats. As a result, these groups became increasingly desperate for new ways of presenting themselves that would better appeal to the American people.

To be fair to Democrats, as the 1984 election approached, few expected the party to stand a chance against incumbent President Ronald Reagan and his running mate George H.W. Bush. Nicol Rae explains that the Democratic Party contained three main wings before the 1984 election: the old New Deal Democrats led by former President Jimmy Carter's Vice President, Walter Mondale, the neoliberals led by Colorado Senator Gary Hart, and the New Left and minorities within the party, led in this contest by Jesse Jackson.[43] As well, there were various

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[42] Masket, *Learning From Loss*, 41.
[43] Rae, *Southern Democrats*, 155.

disaffected Southern Democrats who did not fit neatly into any category, but who were perhaps the most panicked about Democratic electoral losses because their seats were most at risk. In the Democratic Primary that year, the popular figure Ted Kennedy declined to participate, and the main candidates were none other than Mondale and Hart. Mondale was the man to beat in the contest, while Hart was popular due to being one of the primary neoliberal thinkers in the party at the time.[44]

When the Democratic primary ended, it was clear that Walter Mondale would be the party's standard bearer against Reagan. His old ties to other party leaders, dating back to his time as a senator and vice president, gave Mondale the edge, despite Hart's better showing against Reagan in polls of theoretical matchups between the candidates. Scholar Patrick Andelic introduces a more technical approach to the 1984 election when he notes Hart led Reagan by three points in polling done by pollster Bill Hamilton (47-44), while Mondale lost by 18 (55-37). According to Hamilton, this vast disparity was due to the "more independent, affluent in our society" throwing their support to Hart, but not Mondale.[45] Though these were only the beginning days of neoliberal groups within the party, groups that would later include the DLC, it was an early indication to some Democrats, at least, that the way forward for the party was through men like Gary Hart, not Walter Mondale. To them, the suburban-friendly politics of a man like Hart were the only thing that could defeat the Republicans, who seemed unstoppable after the 1984 election, in which Ronald Reagan won the largest number of electoral votes in presidential history. For scholars studying this election, it represented a sea change in Democratic rhetoric. No longer was it just a fluke that Carter had lost; there was a systemic rot

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[44] Rae, *Southern Democrats*, 58.
[45] Andelic, *Donkey Work*, 167.

within the Democratic Party. If Democrats failed to address their unpopularity on the national or presidential level, state politicians worried they would lose their seats as well.

As Mondale turned his attention towards the general election, it became clear that he would need a compelling message to defeat the juggernaut ticket of Reagan-Bush. To do so, Mondale combined his record of big-spending liberalism with a platform of deficit reduction, which was meant to counter Reagan's own calls for such policies.[46] In fact, Mondale was bold enough to promise a raise in taxes to cut the deficit, something he claimed Reagan would also do, but in a deceitful way. However, it seems the electorate did not appreciate Mondale's 'straight-shooting' approach in 1984.[47] The Democrats would lose the election by eighteen percentage points, in what the *Washington Post* would "call "an awesome victory for Reagan" and "Dunkirk" for the Democrats". [48] The crushing defeat came amid better signs for a Democratic Congress. The party held 253 seats in the House (a majority) and looked to take the Senate in 1986. While it was not all bad news for the Democrats, it appeared their strategy on the presidential level was failing. Thus, they looked to new strategies and ideologies, such as neoliberalism.

Neoliberalism can be difficult to define, however. For the most part, scholars traditionally identify neoliberals as those employing a celebration of pragmatism over ideology, and in fact, these groups would sneer at those they deemed too ideological. As Andelic defines it, their policies were largely in favor of the business community, and neoliberals by and large supported policies that supposedly encouraged economic growth, lower taxes, and innovation.[49] It is difficult to say when exactly the ideology was born, but it is clear that by 1984, neoliberalism

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[46] Andelic, *Donkey Work*, 168.
[47] Andelic, *Donkey Work*, 169.
[48] Andelic, *Donkey Work*, 169.
[49] Andelic, *Donkey Work*, 156.

was gaining strength within the Democratic Party. As Democrats turned from Congress towards

extra-governmental groups, it seemed that new forces were rising in the wake of the Democratic

defeat. The chairman of the Democratic Party at the time, Paul G. Kirk Jr., rose to his position

only after overcoming the fierce opposition of several Southern Democrats. These Southern

Democrats, disenchanted with Kirk and Democratic politics, banded together to form the DLC.

In response, Kirk established his own organization in the form of the "Democratic Policy

Commission", or DPC. Meanwhile, the Americans for Democratic Action represented an

organization that existed for decades within the Democratic Party. Mainstream discourse labeled

the ADA as liberal, but it had traditionally opposed left-leaning candidates within the

Democratic Party.[50] By the 1980s, the ADA was resistant, but open to the message of

neoliberalism brought by Paul Tsongas. Though Tsongas received far less praise and attention

than the more liberal Ted Kennedy, many Democrats saw him as a rising figure in the party, and

his speech to the group only made him look stronger.[51]

The rise of the DLC came in the wake of the 1984 Democratic loss to Ronald Reagan,

and academics like Nicol Rae and Patrick Andelic argue scholars should see the following events

in this losing context. Indeed, the loss in 1984 gave reform-minded neoliberals in the party an

impetus to take over, and yet it seemed none could agree on who should be the dominant faction

of neoliberal, business-oriented Democrats within the party. The DLC itself, a nonprofit

organization, had its seeds before the loss of 1984, at the Democratic Party Convention that year.

Several primary figures came together to form this group: primarily, it was Alvin From, the

executive director of the House Democratic Caucus (1981-1985), Virginia Governor and head of

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[50] Jack M. Bloom and Richard G. Hatcher, *Class, Race, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Bloomington: Indiana
University Press, 2019), 82.
[51] Andelic, *Donkey Work*, 150.

the Democratic governors, Charles Robb, and Georgia Senator Sam Nunn[52]. These figures were

all important in their own ways. From provided the intellectual muscle, while Robb and Nunn

led their worried-centrist colleagues into forming the group. The group originally intended to

oppose the election as DNC head of the seemingly-liberal Paul Kirk. When this effort failed, the

DLC turned its attention to other aspects of Democratic politics.[53]

1988: Battered Democrats Look For A New Direction

By 1988, scholars agree, the Democratic Party had not fully abandoned its New Deal

paradigm, but New Deal politics was certainly in crisis. From analysis by historians such as Jill

Lepore and Leo Ribuffo to political scientists such as Nicol C. Rae and even other academics

such as Kenneth S. Baer, it becomes apparent that the Democrats were in a unique moment of

weakness, and hence sought to transform themselves. As some factions within the party

complained that the Democrats had abandoned their values, others, such as the DLC and DPC,

decried party liberalism. According to the Progressive Policy Institute, the public had adopted a

stance of apathy towards liberalism. In fact, the institute argues that nominees in the 1970s and

1980s had become unacceptably liberal.[54] This project hopes to demonstrate that such narratives

will become even clearer in the study of various speeches by prominent Democratic politicians in

the 1980s.

As a reaction to the Democratic Party's devastating third-in-a-row loss in the 1988

election, prominent DLC figure Al From gave a memo in which he attempted to analyze what

had gone wrong. Noting the success of Reagan's own faction in the Republican Party, From

argued that "what we need is a revolution in our party, like Reagan had in his". Even more

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[52] Rae, *Southern Democrats*, 113.
[53] Rae, *Southern Democrats*, 114.
[54] William A. Galston, "The Future of the Democratic Party," *The Brookings Review* 3, no. 2 (1985), 3.

importantly, From looked at the failures of the party in 1980, 1984, and 1988, and perhaps

rightfully, felt vindicated. This was a Democratic Party that had ignored the DLC, and yet as

From himself said, "...a third election where you get your ass kicked makes people say, "Maybe

these guys aren't so goddamn stupid as we thought""..[55] The loss in 1988 convinced the DLC

that, more than ever, it was necessary to take over the Democratic Party, and that the next four

years would be their perfect opportunity to do so.

Taking over the Democratic Party was no simple task for the DLC. As an outside group,

they had no choice but to face the DNC, the official Democratic Party apparatus. Making matters

more difficult, they also faced rivals such as Dukakis, the ADA, and Jerry Brown, the former

Democratic Governor of California. These were all obstacles for the DLC within the neoliberal

wing of the party, as seen in their earlier founding. However, the DLC, notably Al From, became

committed to the creation of a secret weapon. Their dreams would soon come true in the form of

Bill Clinton. Though Clinton decided to stay out of the 1988 election, it was clear he would run

in either 1992 or 1996, depending on whether Dukakis won his race.[56] Clinton's speech at the

1988 Democratic Convention elicited a mixed reception, but it did not discourage From and

others in the DLC, who became determined to recruit Clinton as the new leader of the

organization. Clinton's record of mixed liberalism and centrism in a Southern state, and his

tenure as a Governor, made him a prime candidate to lead the DLC.[57]

It was after Clinton's ascension to the DLC's chairmanship in 1990 that the organization

held a conference discussing its future-Clinton's first event as chair. Clinton, drafting a

manifesto alongside From and other DLC figures, called for free markets, progressive taxes,

[55] Stephanie L. Mudge, *Leftism Reinvented: Western Parties From Socialism to Neoliberalism* (Harvard University Press, 2018), 292.
[56] Nelson, *Clinton's Elections,* 14.
[57] Mudge, *Leftism Reinvented*, 292.

opportunity rather than full equality, and a harsh stance on crime. This manifesto, known as the 'New Orleans Declaration', was important because it represented a greater departure from the mainstream establishment Democratic Party by the DLC, at least in terms of policy prescriptions. With this declaration, they also distanced themselves from the likes of Jesse Jackson and other Civil Rights Movement leaders, which was only the beginning of a pattern of the DLC associating itself with white and male figures within the Democratic Party.[58]

In Clinton's later speeches, during his leadership of the DLC, he used the rhetoric of an outsider to portray the DLC and neoliberalism as a new approach that could successfully transform the Democratic Party. Clinton had to be careful to position himself for the 1992 race, as his DLC affiliation would make him unpopular with more liberal-minded Democrats. As a result, he used language that progressives and liberals could identify with, despite his use of phrases like 'an end to welfare'.[59] Clinton's ability to unite the various disparate factions of the Democratic Party would differentiate him from the failed Democratic nominees of the past two decades, as well as most of his rivals within the Democratic Party. The DLC had found itself in a position to make its case like never before after the 1988 election, but with Clinton at their side, they now had a real chance of taking over the party itself. Though Dukakis was a neoliberal himself, Clinton's position as a southerner made him a more appealing choice to many party leaders, and he would have a much better chance against George H. W. Bush, who had defeated the Democrats in 1988. The DLC certainly thought so, and they became more confident in the wake of the 1988 election, believing that no other groups could lead the Democrats to victory after what had happened in 1988. As mentioned earlier, Clinton had decided 1992 was his best

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[58] Mudge, *Leftism Reinvented*, 293.
[59] John J. Pitney, Jr. *After Reagan: Bush, Dukakis, and the 1988 Election*. (University Press of Kansas, 2019), 184.

shot of winning the presidency, and the DLC and Clinton began to plan their route to the 1992 nomination.

As this project combines the research of scholars in History and Political Science, their combined findings will have a significant impact on the work of this project. Specifically, the work of scholars has allowed the creation of a unique methodology in Chapter Two. That chapter, with the understanding scholars have taken from the 1980, 1984, and 1988 elections, will seek to find commonalities between them, expecting the only real similarity to be in the party's response. This next chapter will predict that this similarity would have a cumulative effect, with each loss driving the party further and further towards what it would ultimately become between 1988 and 1992. Specifically, it will seek to create a way to study the fundamental question of this paper: How have electoral losses for the Democrats on the presidential level in the 1980s changed its identity?

Chapter Two: DLC Discourse and Democratic Dismay

This chapter will address the methodology I use to investigate whether Democratic losses in presidential races in the 1980s contributed to a moderating shift in the party. The methodology will follow a case study approach through a discourse analysis method. Said another way, this means there are a number of primary sources in each case, including speeches, interviews, and key documents from leading 'New Democrats' such as Al From, Chuck Robb, and Gillis Long. To help structure my analysis, I will loosely seek out certain policy-themes like welfare policy or abortion, and there is more on these themes later in the chapter. The goal in finding these themes within the sources is to measure the extent to which they discuss changes in policy, and hence to what extent the project is correct. Essentially, do electoral losses in this period drive the Democrats to what they regard as a more 'moderate' direction? In this chapter, I will discuss the three case studies, specifically looking at the commonality they share in making many Democrats progressively more nervous about electoral loss. Then, this chapter will address the types of sources I analyze, which will provide clear expectations for the study. I will explore the decisions in choosing these sources in a way that demonstrates their utility to the argument.

This study will follow many of the same approaches to this topic that scholars in Chapter One, such as Nicol Rae and Kenneth S. Baer, followed. Specifically, I will use speeches and interviews from influential Democratic party figures on the national level to analyze the language politicians employed following electoral losses on the presidential level. I expect that such politicians will have much to say about those losses, and will likely enumerate why they think the candidate lost. These interviews will mainly come from C-SPAN, as this is the source with the best documentation for speeches from this period. I expect one dominant narrative for this to be the need for moderation, and this study will explore that narrative in the rhetoric of

those politicians. Further, there will be a study of Democratic party literature, as well as policy and strategy manifestos of the Democratic Leadership Council, such as *Renewing America's Promise* and *Rebuilding the Road to Opportunity.* Through these policy manuals and other documents, I expect to observe that moderation is the crucial ingredient for the party to win again, according to the DLC and other similar figures. The following chapter will give a more in-depth understanding of the case study approach used in this study, and demonstrate why it is important.

Methodology

The nature of the research question in this study requires an analysis of several elections that Democrats lost on the presidential stage, especially in 1980, 1984 and 1988. Primarily, I will conduct these case studies to identify how narratives differ after each loss and, looking at the cases in totality, how the sense of urgency increases after each successive loss. This is a recurring theme in American history. Political parties react to electoral losses with restructuring and intense analysis, perhaps even changing the purpose(s) of the party. They also react with attempts to build alliances with skeptical or disenchanted factions of the party.[1] For the Democrats, then, the previous three losses during the 1980s only accelerated the process of transformation. With each successive contest, leading figures in the Democratic Party were under increasing pressure to find a way to win.[2] They engaged with this issue in a variety of ways, and scholars identified a few illustrative examples in the literature. Following the 1980 loss, Gillis Long and Al From strategized about the formation of a new group to reform the party in a direction they regarded as moderate. This group was the House Democratic Caucus's Committee

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[1] Masket, *Learning From Loss*, 119.
[2] Rae, *Southern Democrats*, 155.

on Party Effectiveness (CPE). In addition, they formed the National House Democratic Caucus in 1983 to help further the goals of the CPE.[3] After the 1984 landslide, worried Southern Democrats formed the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) as a successor to the earlier CPE and NHDC. They also sought to implement the idea of 'Super Tuesday' in the Democratic nomination process, which would allow various Southern states to assert themselves early in the contest and have an outsize influence over who ultimately won.[4] In the wake of the 1988 election loss, Democrats sought out figures they viewed as saviors for the party, particularly Bill Clinton, Mario Cuomo, Al Gore, and Jesse Jackson.[5]

As mentioned in Chapter One, scholars disagree when identifying a moment or series of moments in which the Democratic Party took a "moderate turn" in the 1980s. The project will explore the cases of 1980, 1984, and 1988, because they are three pivotal contests in which Democrats were on the losing side consecutively. Therefore, I predict that the impact of electoral loss is that the Democrats become increasingly exacerbated. I chose these specific elections because they are pivotal for studying recent Democratic Party history. In the 1970s, there was the McGovern-Fraser Commission, which made significant changes to the party that activists hoped would give them more power in the party. Most Democrats did not challenge the changes set in motion in that commission until after the 1980 election, when Gillis Long and Al From mounted an institutional challenge to those activist-friendly reforms. This challenge took the form of striving to give power back to elected officials in the Democratic Party, instead of passionate party members.[6] Meanwhile, even though the 1990s were the decade in which the Democrats found success on the national stage once again, the 1980s were when the processes to achieve

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[3] Baer, *Reinventing Democrats*, 39.
[4] Rae, *Southern Democrats*, 59.
[5] Nelson, *Clinton's Elections,* 13.
[6] Baer, *Reinventing Democrats*, 48.

victory were set into motion.[7] New factions had emerged to challenge the old New Deal coalition

and the newly-dominant 'New Left', whose adherents became prominent during George

McGovern's 1972 campaign and increasingly controlled the party since then. Therefore, the

1980s are a perfect scope for this project, because they represent the time when the factions

opposing the 'New Left' order in the party solidified into Southern Democrats, neoliberals rising

to challenge them, and many Democrats leaving the party altogether, lost to the Republican

Party.[8]

However, to effectively compare such dissimilar cases over a period of twelve years, a

unified set of approaches must be found. For this project, I use the approaches of speech,

manifesto, newspaper, and other primary source analysis. This includes a few key documents

surrounding the birth of groups like the DLC because I expect these will also be informative on

my topic. In terms of speeches, I believe they are an effective source of data for analyzing

diction on this topic, because there are few better opportunities to make one's case as a politician

than in a speech. Just as importantly, they give a keen insight into the politicians' thought

process, or at least what parts of that thought they wish to share in the public arena.

Evidence and Sources

The following list is not exhaustive, but it will demonstrate a sampling of the speeches in

the project. Before the DLC existed, Gillis Long and Al From had collaborated to form the CPE.

In a speech in June 1984, Long gave an interview about the state of the Democratic Party and the

role of the CPE in the party.[9] The hope for this source is that there may be some discussion of

Long's vision for the party moving forward, a vision he would not live to see, but would

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[7] Rae, *Southern Democrats*, 120.
[8] Baer, *Reinventing Democrats*, 32.
[9] Gillis Long, "Democratic National Party," C-SPAN.

eventually be implemented. As far back as 1986, only a year after Al From created the DLC,

prominent members of that organization gave speeches that media organizations filmed, and

these are accessible on C-SPAN today. The earliest examples of this are from a discussion that

occurred on December 12th, 1986, in which Richard Gephardt spoke about the goals and future

of the DLC in an interview format.[10] Here, the hope is that there can be a sense of what the DLC

was like between the 1984 and 1988 elections. This was before it had to "moderate" its own

views to fit within the mainstream Democratic Party, and as such the candidates may be more

candid about their views in these speeches.[11] On the other hand though, Gephardt may not

demonstrate the urgency DLC members displayed after 1988. These sources will include

speeches from the DLC's leader, Richard Gephardt, and a main member, Chuck Robb.

There will also be discussions of later speeches, and the first is a speech from March

11th, 1989 at a DLC meeting in Philadelphia. This event had speakers and guests including Sam

Nunn, Bill Clinton, and Chuck Robb.[12][13] Another set of speeches that take place during the

DLC's Fall Conference concern the "challenges facing Congress". Richard Gephardt is the

leading figure at this conference, though Bill Clinton is also present as a guest, among other

affiliated politicians.[14] These later speeches are shown as a reaction to Michael Dukakis's

devastating loss in the 1988 election. I hope they will show a party increasingly concerned with

winning, even more so than after the 1984 disaster.

In addition to the aforementioned speeches, I will also analyze several primary source

documents to further bolster the argument that electoral losses led to a 'moderating' shift in the

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[10] Richard Gephardt, "Democratic Leadership Council," C-SPAN.
[11] Baer, *Reinventing Democrats*, 75.
[12] Samuel Nunn, "Towards a New Democratic Agenda," C-SPAN.
[13] Samuel Nunn, "Keynote Address," C-SPAN.
[14] Richard Gephardt, "Challenges Facing Congress," C-SPAN.

Democratic Party. These sources are different from the speeches, because they represent private sources that the Democrats distributed internally, rather than speeches that had certain types of diction for a public audience. This difference is notable, as the rhetoric between the public sources when compared to the private ones may change. That is one thing I will investigate with the following sources. Given their private nature, they were harder to find, and I only located them within some of my secondary sources. Then, the sources themselves came from libraries across the country. Among these documents, there is one from 1984 titled "Renewing America's Promise", a book written by Gillis Long and Al From that aims to prescribe solutions to the woes of the Democratic Party.[15] The two would work together on an even earlier document called "Rebuilding the Road to Opportunity". Long and From authored this document in 1982 as a response to Jimmy Carter's 1980 loss. In this, there is an earlier perspective on the Democratic Party's problems, though I expect the approach Long and From take will largely be the same.[16]

Newspaper articles, though inevitably possessing some sort of bias, also serve as an excellent medium to search for the presence of certain narratives. For example, in a *Washington Post* article about the 'New Democrats', the authors discuss various rising centrist Democrats who had been eyeing runs in 1988.[17] In another article in *The Nation*, the authors give a scathing rebuke of the DLC's politics and their obsession with winning the next election through any means necessary.[18] The article also contains discussions of factions within the party, and I hope to bolster my argument using these sources. In fact, rather than having these articles as main

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[15] Al From and Gillis Long, *Renewing America's Promise* (National House Democratic Caucus, 1984).
[16] Al From and Gillis Long, *Rebuilding the Road to Opportunity* (National House Democratic Caucus, 1982).
[17] Paul Taylor, "Democrats' New Centrists Preen for '88," The Washington Post (WP Company, November 10, 1985).
[18] Alexander Cockburn and Robert Pollin, "How to Talk About Economic Strategy," The Nation, February 28, 1987.

sources, they will serve to supplement my primary sources and provide information when needed.

Methodological Approach

To study these speeches efficiently, it is best to divide the content into smaller pieces that I can analyze and compare with other speeches. In this instance, I will conduct a discourse analysis, in which I identify certain themes in the sources I analyze. My hope is that these themes are present across the board in the speeches. This approach is effective because it demonstrates a unified concern among Democrats, and more importantly, a unified approach rhetorically. This is the best way to indicate a similarity in arguments after the 1980, 1984, and 1988 elections, and can perhaps even demonstrate that the Democrats became more desperate over time. I base these themes in the language used in sources from Chapter One.

Specifically, the analysis will include the tried-and-true issues of American politics at this time, as they appear in the literature. This includes social issues and more specifically, the Culture Wars, economic issues such as taxes and regulations, foreign policy issues about trade deficits or defense, and Democratic Party issues such as primaries and party control. Notably, while every source will differ on these issues, it will be useful to see which ones are discussed more or less over time, and which are connected with electoral losses. These four types of arguments will each contain the most highly discussed and relevant issues, or sub-themes, in those categories. Those issues will be included based on their presence in a variety of literature and rhetoric rather than a few passing mentions.

The significance of using a discourse analysis in this project comes from its utility as a method of studying politicians. Indeed, when used in this context, a political discourse analysis has a broad focus on political actors. This includes politicians, government officials, and political

professionals.[19] Once these figures are identified, the goal of a discourse analysis is to analyze their rhetoric. The way this rhetoric is approached differs from other methods because context is a key factor in the analysis.[20] This means that I will listen to the language of politicians in my sources while also taking the context into account. This strategy of using context allows me to question why a politician would use certain language in one speech, or why their position has changed over a given time period.

A discourse analysis avoids the rigid data-driven focus of other methods, and this is also important. A focus on data allows scholars to quantify measures. However, in the context of rhetoric about electoral loss, it is difficult to establish a coding procedure that would establish the connection between loss and change in any satisfactory way. It is not a black and white issue because politicians are not always forthright about their views, nor is every politician the same. By taking context and variety into account, a discourse analysis becomes the most useful method to use in a project like this.[21] For a discourse analysis to work most effectively, I believe I need a table that demonstrates what specific issues I am paying attention to. Politicians have a laundry list of issues they discuss in any given speech, and I believe there will be certain issues that politicians may change their positions on given consecutive electoral losses.

A singular table will serve alongside the analysis in order to help me categorize issues into themes. In this table, there will be more specific sub-themes among the larger themes noted above. These themes come from the literature, where I looked for the most notable thematic areas in this period and then decided to include them. For example, given that economic growth was such a prominent issue for Democrats in several sources, I included it. I also include party

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[19] Teun van Dijk, "What Is Political Discourse Analysis? - Discourse in Society," Discourse.org (University of Amsterdam), 12.
[20] Van Dijk, "What Is Political Discourse Analysis?", 15.
[21] Van Dijk, "What Is Political Discourse Analysis?", 41.

issues like loss because that is precisely what I want to look for. It is likely that I will have a better chance of finding rhetoric on electoral loss if I look for it directly.

The themes are meant to act as general categories because I need to take context into account. This looseness is necessary because not every speech will contain the same wording surrounding these themes, but I still want to give readers a sense of what I am looking for. I will use the themes to analyze certain types of language and categorize them loosely but effectively. Once I have listened to politicians talking about these themes, I will consider their context, which is the more important factor. Specifically, I will see if Democratic rhetoric on those policies changed and reflects a growing unease about party loss. Notably, I am open to the emergence of new themes as I conduct my analysis, and the method is meant to be somewhat flexible as compared to a content analysis.

Table I: Wider Themes

<u>Theme</u>	<u>Sub-Theme</u>
Culture Wars/Social	Guns Abortion LGBTQ+ Gender Crime Religion National Service
Economic	Welfare Higher Taxes Lower Taxes Income Inequality Deregulation Growth Unions
Foreign Policy	Trade Defense Interventions Cold War Rise of Japan

Political/Party Issues/Party Structure	Primaries
	Congressional vs Presidential
	Losses
	Moderation
	Constituents/Makeup of the Party

The table lays out a method of analysis that enumerates the expected themes and subthemes, what those subjects entail, and how they will be found using specific terminology. The project will use this table as a general guide to locate mentions of specific issues in speeches and text documents. Both sources are available, and can give insight into what certain Democrats were planning to address the party's misfortunes on the presidential level. To know whether the wider themes are present, it is necessary to look at specific subthemes, as defined in the table above.

Expectations

As discussed in previous parts of this project, I expect to find significant rhetoric connecting electoral losses to the party perceiving it is out of touch with mainstream American voters on certain issues. Following that line of argumentation, I expect the party's prescriptive approach to involve moderation, showing that prominent Democrats believed this approach was fundamentally necessary to win back the White House. The project hypothesizes that this connection will be best seen in speeches and other paraphernalia from Southern and Western Democrats, and, to a small extent, neoliberals, groups forming a large percentage of the 'New Democrat' faction.[22] These Democrats, observing their party in danger on the national level, worried about their fortunes on a local level as well.[23] This fear only worsened over time, as

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[22] Western Democrats are somewhat outside the scope of my study as they are mentionable but not necessarily worthy of discussion beyond that. For those who are interested, however, refer to Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton University Press, 2006). A curious reader could also look at Michelle Nickerson and Darren Dochuk, *Sunbelt Rising* (University of Pennsylvania Press, Inc, 2013).

[23] Rae, *Southern Democrats*, 113.

Democratic panic over consecutive electoral losses on the presidential level increased. So, the project expects to find an increase in calls for the party to fundamentally change its approach to politics to win again.

The expectations of the study are in line with the arguments made in the "Power of Narratives" school. Like that school, my project aims to find narratives arising from electoral losses that show such losses have driven the party in a certain direction. In this case, the direction would be one Democrats perceived as closer to the moderate or independent American voter. It will seek to address the arguments of the other schools in a sense, because it will show that it was not the alienation on social issues alone that drove change; it was the consecutive electoral losses. For example, as Kenneth Baer notes, the 1988 election only strengthened the arguments of the DLC and others making similar arguments. The 1988 loss granted them power they would not have had earlier in the decade, despite the party having the same problems in terms of alienation from the American people.[24] As a rebuke against those arguing Bill Clinton was the main figure driving this process of moderation, this discourse analysis will demonstrate that other politicians were making prescriptive arguments for the Democratic Party long before Clinton. These arguments revolved around the same sort of moderation Clinton would advocate for in his political career.

After utilizing the methods set forth in this chapter, the project will proceed to Chapter Three, which will be a discussion of the results found using the methodology. This form of analysis puts the arguments of scholars in the "Power of Narratives" school to the test. I expect the revelatory results of this project to prove their understanding is more correct than the arguments of other schools. I may also find there is a difference in argumentation between the

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[24] Baer, *Reinventing Democrats*, 8.

public and the private sources I use, so that will be interesting to note as well. Ultimately, the results of Chapter Two will demonstrate that the origins of Democratic Party evolution towards 'moderation' in the 1980s came as a result of election losses.

Chapter Three: Analyzing the Acronym Attack

Losses on the presidential level served as useful opportunities for reform-minded moderate Democrats to call for change. In every source, speakers called for a separation from past policies and frameworks. One example of this was the push to move away from Walter Mondale's welfare policies. New Democrats said his policies on this front repelled "swing voters" because they helped only the "undeserving poor". They additionally criticized Mondale for his belief that "the whole welfare state apparatus is sacred".[1] As the sources will show, New Democrats usually employed similar arguments. They would explain the necessity for changes by pointing to presidential losses and warning fellow party members that such losses would befall them if the party did not heed the call to moderate. This fit with the earlier hypothesis that there would be an increase in phrasing about party change, specifically the need to do so in a moderate direction, as Democrats lost consecutive presidential elections in the 1980s.

There were complications in this sort of analysis. The most prominent was the contrast between public-facing rhetoric about the party's direction and what many of these same figures were saying behind the scenes. It is difficult to speculate why this is the case, but I will discuss this factor in the chapter. In public, Democrats sometimes took a careful approach, still using rhetoric that would appeal to members of the old New Deal coalition, like unions. However, they would also try to publicly appeal to swing voters who they believed Democrats had lost. These voters were typically white and blue-collar. Meanwhile, in private, Democrats were often unabashedly in favor of plans they might only tepidly support in public, even favoring programs they admitted would potentially harm Americans in the short term. Other times, though, they had

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[1] Baer, *Reinventing Democrats*, 52.

to be careful of internal party rivals like Jesse Jackson, who would be more attentive to internal rhetoric than the public.

As every source is understandably different, this chapter will take each of those videos or documents and talk about them one by one. I will study the policy frameworks present in these speeches and focus on rhetoric related to loss, change, or moderation. The chapter will chronologically include these sources chronologically, given one of the largest tasks of the project is to see if Democratic speech changed over time. If so, the chapter will determine whether that speech tended more towards issues considered centrist or neoliberal in the literature. Given that the rationale for these changes is so often connected with loss, I expect to demonstrate at least some sort of correlation between the two.

In practice, this means I will begin with the two sources I have from the 1980-1984 period, both from Gillis Long, though one is a public interview and one is an internal manifesto. Next, I will study Gillis Long's second text and compare it with a Dick Gephardt speech from 1986. The final three sources are all from 1989, and will likely present a significant contrast in focus and rhetoric to the earlier sources. After I conclude my analysis of the sources themselves, I plan to conduct a more thoughtful inspection of the results and discuss their importance today. After that, the next chapter will serve as a conclusion to the project as a whole.

Figure 1: Gillis Long. *C-SPAN*. Washington D.C., June 25, 1984.

1980-1984: The Gillis Long Haul

In the wake of the 1980 election loss, which turned out to be a setback for the Democrats, a Louisiana Democratic congressman took the initiative to find a way to make that experience more constructive. A World War II hero, Gillis Long hailed from the Long family, which had been prominent in Louisiana since his uncle, radical populist Huey Long, rose to prominence in the 1930s. Long however took a more "moderate" stance than many of his more radical kinsmen, as evidenced by his own identification as a "national Democrat in the South". This Southern identification was something Long and many other New Democrats would revisit time and again to justify their perceived centrism. Given their location, they had to be that way. Long founded the Committee on Party Effectiveness soon after 1980. In his words, it was to "respond to the

desire of many Democratic Members to reassess the direction in which our party was headed in the wake of its losses in the 1980 election".[2]

Political party or faction manifestos are not uncommon in the field. In this case, Long sought to create a manifesto that would outline possible new directions for Democrats to pursue in the 1980s. He titled this manifesto *Rebuilding the Road to Opportunity*, and its main goal was to put the work of this new committee on paper. Interestingly, Long took care to emphasize that the views contained in the text were not necessarily the views of the party, and he was not covering the entirety of the Democratic platform. Rather, it was an attempt to showcase a few areas where Long and others believed they had achieved some progress on policy issues.[3]

Rather than focusing on earlier Democratic themes of "haves versus have-nots", Long explains the priorities of this manifesto as "growth and fairness".[4]The manifesto is divided into sections, each focusing on a certain policy area, but all revolving around the wider theme of growth and fairness. The first sections had a decidedly economic focus (long term economic policy, housing, small business), and then the manifesto slowly transitioned to issues often identified with the Culture Wars (women's economics, the environment, crime) and finally a small section on national security. The most important departure from earlier Democrats is how he seeks to achieve these aims. While Democrats had long championed unions, Long called for a "lessening of the adversarial relationship between business and labor" to facilitate growth. On the issue of fairness, Long called for the elimination of regulations that are "counterproductive and unnecessarily restrictive", arguing they would hurt small businesses.[5] This was a departure from earlier Democratic arguments, which used regulation as a tool to promote fairness.

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[2] From and Long, *Rebuilding the Road to Opportunity*, 1.
[3] From and Long, *Rebuilding the Road to Opportunity,* 2.
[4] From and Long, *Rebuilding the Road to Opportunity,* 10.
[5] From and Long, *Rebuilding the Road to Opportunity,* 56.

The economic focus of the first few chapters makes sense, given the context of the time it was written. In the early 1980s, the country suffered from a recession that had bled over from the Carter Administration and continued under Reagan.[6] Equally devastating, 60% of Americans thought the country spent too little on national defense under President Carter.[7] Carter's inability to connect with the American people was not lost on Gillis Long. He contrasted his platform with previous Democrats by saying "we must reduce the federal deficit, eliminate wasteful or outdated spending, and take a critical look at all federal programs…to reduce spending wherever we can".[8] The later inclusion of an entire chapter on "renewing the entrepreneurial spirit" is another quiet acknowledgement that Republicans had outfoxed Democrats on economic issues, and the perception of Americans had gone in the former's direction.[9] Democrats took note of their loss in 1980, and decided they no longer represented mainstream Americans.[10] For example, instead of including a chapter supporting unions, an issue the party of 1980 emphasized, Long encouraged the creation of a chapter on policies Democrats could offer for small businesses, including a section about the "elimination of red tape". This represented a departure from New Deal rhetoric.[11] Of course, this also reflected the personal views of Gillis Long and Al From. Long had previously lost an election because he was more liberal on race than his opponent, and From had seen Democratic losses when they were not "honest about the failings of government programs" in the McGovern campaign.[12]

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[6] Baer, *Reinventing Democrats*, 28.
[7] Baer, *Reinventing Democrats*, 23.
[8] From and Long, *Rebuilding the Road to Opportunity,* 2.
[9] Baer, *Reinventing Democrats*, 43.
[10] Baer, *Reinventing Democrats*, 39.
[11] From and Long, *Rebuilding the Road to Opportunity*, 56.
[12] Baer, *Reinventing Democrats*, 37.

Long and From's real experience with losses and fear of future defeats made their

Committee on Party Effectiveness the strongest force, pushing for a new "moderate" direction in

the party, but even this was not yet the powerful force the 'New Democrats' or DLC became

later. It is notable that Long and his colleagues did not fully repudiate the New Deal, nor did they

snub the New Liberals, who were the dominant Democratic faction, but one they saw as taking

the party in the wrong direction. Many factions, including Southern Democrats and emerging

neoliberals, disagreed with the direction of the party in 1982, but had yet to formulate coherent

opposition to the New Liberals or New Deal establishment. This is evidence of a lack of

repudiation. Long and his colleagues lamented wasteful spending, but they also decried the

Republican "concentration of economic power in the hands of a few mammoth corporations".[13]

Most notably, they argued that in the economy, "government must be a vital partner".[14] This

argument tied them to the New Deal, and for the New Liberals, they commissioned whole

chapters on women's rights and the environment as concessions, though they departed from New

Liberals in important ways, such as cautioning that environmental policy should not get in the

way of economic growth.[15]

  This manifesto, though seemingly confined to a few concerned House members, quickly

spread among the party's elected officials. Gillis Long and Al From worked to publicize it in the

national party and lower levels, and their efforts were successful. Long, with the help of House

Speaker Tip O'Neill and James Jones, would create a 1983 budget resolution that included many

of the document's proposals. Democratic business leaders found the manifesto "innovative" and

it would even serve as the backbone of the Democrats' 1983 response to President Reagan's

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[13] From and Long, *Rebuilding the Road to Opportunity*, 53.
[14] From and Long, *Rebuilding the Road to Opportunity*, 17.
[15] Baer, *Reinventing Democrats*, 43.

State of the Union Address.[16] David Sawyer, the political consultant who ultimately created the response, said the manifesto "was a resource for the script". In a *New York Times* article about the 1983 response, journalist Sidney Blumenthal concluded "thus some of the central elements of the industrial-policy notion, developed by a small circle of intellectuals, came to be presented as the official position of the Democratic Party".[17] President Carter's 1980 loss had inspired the work of Long and From, and even helped them influence the party. However, opposition from this new direction was in its infancy, and it would take further presidential losses to fan the flame further.

By 1984, the party's policies (and politics) were clearly moving in a direction From and Long wanted. A major piece of party politics Long's Committee on Party Effectiveness mentioned (but did not discuss at length) in their 1982 document was the nomination process. In the 1970s, party officials were largely shut out of Democratic primaries, relegated to only a handful of delegates. This was true in most other areas of party affairs, and many Congressional Democrats cited this lack of power over the party's direction as a reason for their recent losses. The perception was that activists and 'special interests' now controlled the party, sending it in a direction that did not represent a wide swath of American voters.[18] To fix the party's problems, the future 'New Democrats' would need to secure their power.

Louisiana Democratic Congressman Gillis Long's interview with C-SPAN in June 1984 served as an opportunity for him to espouse his beliefs from two years earlier. However, it also included (and excluded) important components of his previous rhetoric, while also revealing new ideas he had not discussed before. The interview name was coined due to its focus on the state of

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[16] Baer, *Reinventing Democrats*, 44.
[17] Sidney Blumenthal, "Drafting a Democratic Industrial Plan," The New York Times (The New York Times, August 28, 1983).
[18] Baer, *Reinventing Democrats*, 46.

the national Democratic Party, as well as Long's classification as a "National Democrat in the South". It occurred in the wake of the party's 1984 primaries, and after expressing his distaste with the primaries, Long would emphasize the need for political and procedural change within the Democratic Party. Regarding themes, the main focus of the interview is political. Rather than delving into details about policy preferences, Long talks about elected officials regaining control in the party, as well as the need for a "new direction".[19]

One possible explanation for why Long called for procedural change for Democrats in his interview more than the earlier text is that this time, the audience was the American people, who thought the party was largely out of touch, as stated earlier. However, in private, when the audience was other party members, and likely New Liberals, Long had to be more careful about attacking their reforms. In fact, Al From would later admit this was generally the case.[20] In the interview, the interviewer asks Long who in the party would lead the call for change. Long responds by praising a group of influential newly-elected Democrats who "got elected not through the old Democratic coalitions in most instances; they got elected on their own". Already, it is clear Long is openly hostile to the 'old Democratic coalitions' who may refer to the New Deal coalition, the New Liberal/Left coalition, or both, groups that Long and the CPE believed had too much control. Elaborating, Long explains that "the (House Democratic) caucus had gotten to the point where it was not really an influential institution within the House of Representatives…it was because of the fact that these people want to participate in everything…we closed the meetings…so that we could have family meetings". This type of

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[19] Long, "Democratic National Party," C-SPAN.
[20] Baer, *Reinventing Democrats*, 43.

language about "family meetings" is just one example of rhetoric that may be oriented towards a more public audience.

Long's explanation signals to listeners that he was promoting Democratic congressional power at the expense of 'special interests'. This meant the House Democratic Caucus was closed to outside activists or other influence groups. Such actors were the most common targets for 'special interest' language. With them gone, it appeared the Congressional Democrats could have some say in House and party affairs again. He would later argue "we…succeeded at getting the rules changed so that we could have better representation and participation in the Democratic affairs by the Democratic members of the Congress, the ones that are elected…last time, at the convention four years ago, we only had 37 members of Congress there. This year, we have 164 [delegates to the convention]." This represented the beginnings of the re-inclusion of party members into the delegation process, as a group labeled "superdelegates".

In the interview, Long mentions the CPE, explaining that it was created to "develop a centrist position within the Democratic Party". Here, there is something sparingly mentioned (if at all) in the manifesto: Long directly uses the language of centrism to describe where he wants the party to go. There may be a few reasons for this. One could argue Republican arguments and public opinion had only continued to haunt Democrats, who by 1984 had begun to internalize it more and were responding by acting more 'centrist'. Another explanation is that Long explicitly felt the need to include language of centrism when his audience was public, perhaps thinking it would appeal to listeners, while in the text, it was unnecessary.

It was clear Long was discussing rule changes as a means of changing the party and its fortunes. He noted that "representative people, rather than outsiders…ought to have more of a say than they've been having these past few years in the party. I think that's one of the reasons

the party had gotten off on some tangents that began to worry a number of us".[21] Evidently, Long

expressed honest distaste at the reforms of the 1970s, and he might have also signaled to listeners

that the party was under control again, not in the hands of extreme activists.

As a source, the interview with Long differs from the manifesto in its public facing

nature, and its explicit focus on rules and losses instead of policy proposals. Long's inclusion of

rhetoric about moderating the Democratic Party, as well as essentially seizing it back from out-

of-touch activists, makes sense for a public audience who may not know anything about

Democratic policy beyond disliking it. Meanwhile, in the manifesto, Long advocates real

policies that would transform the Democratic Party beyond procedure and wording, and

ultimately produce a more "centrist" party that Republicans would find harder to attack, partly

because Democrats would adopt some of their own arguments on crime and national defense

while also advocating for education.

Figure 2: Richard Gephardt. *C-SPAN*. Washington D.C., December 12, 1986.

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[21] Long, "Democratic National Party," C-SPAN.

1984-1988: Rise of the DLC

Between 1982 and 1984, the groups opposing the Democratic Party's post-1972 mainstream consolidated their influence. The next iteration of the Committee on Party Effectiveness's manifesto came in a new text. In 1984, they released *Renewing America's Promise*, which Long argued "combines the separate strands [of *Rebuilding the Road to Opportunity*] in a single, broadened, strategic vision".[22] Further, it was written via a new group. Long and others had taken the CPE a step further and formed a National House Democratic Caucus or NHDC, independent of Congress. Its most important feature, however, was that it could bring in private individuals and wealthy donors.[23] According to Long, the purpose of this NHDC was to "spread our ideas and proposals across America".[24] This was also the goal for *Renewing America's Promise*, a text that would serve as a unified policy stratagem for interested parties to read.

Meanwhile, the Hunt Commission, named after North Carolina Governor James Hunt, and existing to bring elected officials back into the presidential nominating process, gained steam. The plan was to add an extra 20-30% to the total delegate total, which would be made up of party officials and elected Democrats. These "superdelegates" would exert significant influence in the nominating process. They would build on Long's previously mentioned party members at the convention, surpassing them numerically and influentially. While publishing *Renewing America's Promise* was one component of From and Long's plan to change the party, reforming the party's rules was a second simultaneous component.[25]

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[22] From and Long, *Renewing America's Promise*, vi.
[23] Baer, *Reinventing Democrats*, 45.
[24] From and Long, *Renewing America's Promise*, vi.
[25] Baer, *Reinventing Democrats*, 50.

In the new policy manifesto, some of Long and the NHDC's rhetoric became increasingly removed from the old party mainstream. Several new additions showed up, for example, a call for an all-volunteer national army. The authors state that such policies are needed even if they are "unpopular ideas of savings and sacrifice".[26] More familiar diction from these circles also made an appearance, though sometimes it carried new emphasis. Though the deficit had been a passing issue before for Long, by 1984, he agonized that Reagan had been running up massive deficits in the economy. The issue must have been important, because he dedicated most of the new manifesto's chapter on growth to discussing a balanced budget and ways to achieve it.[27] With that, there was renewed consideration of cuts to entitlement programs for wealthy retirees or farmers.[28]

Though direct discussion about electoral loss was elusive in this text, it could be surmised this was because of its nature as a private document, like its predecessor. Contrary to what I had originally thought, public sources seem to actually contain more direct rhetoric about loss, while private sources seem to accept it as a given, or exclude it for unknown reasons. Interestingly, perhaps because of its nature as a private source, Long and the other authors almost never gave citations for their information. This could lead one to wonder whether their data about loss and other issues was correct or not. True or not, however, Long wasted no time setting out the goals of the NHDC's manifesto: "It is imperative that Democrats demonstrate to the American people in 1984 that we are not asking for a return to the policies they rejected in 1980, that we have the will to lead and the resolve to make hard choices". The group, and the manifesto, were made to "spread our ideas and proposals across America" and "...help set the terms of the public debate

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[26] Baer, *Reinventing Democrats*, 16.
[27] From and Long, *Renewing America's Promise*, 11.
[28] Baer, *Reinventing Democrats*, 45.

for 1984".[29] Therefore, it is fair to say that this group was formed due to electoral losses and thus aimed to change the party's policies and priorities.

Regardless of the success the NHDC, Long, and From were having in publicizing their message, they experienced several setbacks. In 1984, Walter Mondale attempted to unite the old New Deal coalitions of labor, liberal organizations, and African Americans, snubbing New Democratic calls for a new coalition. His confidence in the strategy came at least in part from Democratic success in the 1982 midterms, though he was too late to realize that this same approach did not work in the dynamics of the 1984 election.[30] Worse, on January 20th, 1985, before Gillis Long could begin planning a response to the 1984 defeat, he fell victim to a heart attack, leaving the mantle of leading the nascent 'New Democrats' to Al From. From, undeterred and sensing renewed possibilities for reform after the 1984 disaster, worked with Al Gore, Chuck Robb, and others to form a new organization: the Democratic Leadership Council. This organization was a spiritual successor to Long's earlier organizations. By the time the next source was created, it was clear this group, although still in its infancy, represented a larger challenge to the party's ideology than either the CPE or NHDC. These 'New Democrats' had only solidified their beliefs about the woes of the party, and they would not be turned away.

In the wake of their 1984 loss, the now solidified New Democratic faction became more worried and thus, more determined about the future of the Democratic Party. Their reasoning was, as Al From put it, that "the lack of competitiveness [at the presidential level] would ramify throughout the rest of the party".[31] Gillis Long and Al From had handled opposition to the mainstream party delicately, but it was clear to the founders of the new Democratic Leadership

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[29] From and Long, *Renewing America's Promise*, vi.
[30] Baer, *Reinventing Democrats*, 51.
[31] Baer, *Reinventing Democrats*, 66.

Council (DLC) that they had to be more brazen in their approach to changing the Democratic

Party. This involved forging a new electoral coalition of "moderate and "populist" southerners

and westerners, plus the "so-called neo-liberals" in other parts of the country around "ideas, not

constituency groups"".[32]

By 1986, Richard "Dick" Gephardt had taken the reins of leadership in the DLC and,

along with From, crafted a new strategic agenda that would diverge from both the Democratic

mainstream and earlier ideas of Long and the CPE. These differences were mostly in terms of

brazenness, though sometimes the policies differed. Notably, the presence of Paul G. Kirk as the

chairman of the DNC made things interesting. He was a sort of 'New Democrat' himself.

Although he was not affiliated with the DNC, he agreed with many of their goals. So, to

distinguish themselves, the DLC formed as an extra-party organization that would have more

freedom to act on their goals. These goals included the fact that, as From noted, "our agenda will

be moderate in traditional political terms, far different than the liberal agenda with which the

party is identified today."[33]

The DLC partly spread their message through interviews and press releases. In one 1986

interview with C-SPAN, Gephardt took the opportunity to explain his views to a public audience.

Contrary to Long and the NHDC's 1984 manifesto, this interview would have a different

audience. However, there are two factors that are even more important than the audience in this

case. For one, this interview takes place after the 1984 election, so per my thesis, I expected he

would be more desperate about winning. Another thing to note is the 1984 manifesto was less

private than its 1982 predecessor. It was meant to be publicized, and though few probably read it,

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[32] Baer, *Reinventing Democrats*, 67.
[33] Baer, *Reinventing Democrats*, 68.

it was geared for a more public audience. So, the contrast between this source and the 1984 manifesto will likely not be as stark in terms of public vs. private faces, although it will demonstrate a change from the earlier source.

Early in the interview, Gephardt set out to explain the purpose and goals of the DLC. Answering an interviewer's question about the DLC, Gephardt answered, explaining "the genesis of the DLC was to bring all different peoples together. To allow senators the chance to talk to representatives, and both of them…to talk with governors…and also bring in people from the private sector…to talk about policy".[34] Interestingly, Gephardt's rhetoric is quite a contrast here from From's talk about the founding of the DLC, which stated the organization was specifically for moderates, but it does reflect a continuation with Long's earlier position about including many voices in the conversation.

It is also notable that Gephardt mentioned the private sector, as this is a theme he would bring up more than once. In general, the private sector was a topic most DLC members would include in their speeches, and typically at their own expense. Such rhetoric would lead to *New York Times* journalist Arthur Schlesinger Jr. calling them "a quasi-Reaganite formation" and the New Left saying "one Republican party is more than enough". Regardless, when the interviewer asked Gephardt about the 1988 election, asking "trade, economics, are those gonna be the key issues?", Gephardt responded with more language about private interests. He noted that "there are a whole bunch of things that have to be done…that can only be done by the government and the private sector, and most of it has to be the private sector, in leading the American people to

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[34] Gephardt, "Democratic Leadership Council," C-SPAN.

be more productive".[35] Long had always emphasized the role of government, but by 1986, New

Democrats had shifted their focus to talking about the private sector.

One area where Gephardt was surprisingly careful was on race. The DLC had been

accused of ignoring abortion, gay rights, and most importantly, racial issues, all of which were

largely accurate.[36] These were issues that the New Liberals had emphasized for decades, but the

DLC found other issues more important, and perhaps better suited to the white men they wanted

to win over. Jesse Jackson issued one of the most stinging critiques of all, labeling the DLC

"Democrats for the Leisure Class".[37] When Jackson was saying this, he was calling the DLC a

front for wealthy Democratic donors and interests. Politicians like Jackson felt ignored by the

DLC, as if their voice was a mere nuisance. Sometimes, it became apparent that voters felt the

same way. During a C-SPAN interview, a caller asked Gephardt about his rivalry with Jackson.

When the caller said "I'm getting this feeling that y'all feel that Jesse Jackson is a problem",

Gephardt was quick to respond by saying "I don't think anything that was said here, that I heard,

would indicate that anybody, including Jesse Jackson, is seen as a problem in the Democratic

Party".[38] While the DLC was overt in its calls to transform the party into a moderate, more

business oriented party, figures like Jackson demonstrated an ability to cut the organization down

to size.

It became clear the old Democratic strategies to win presidential elections were not going

to work anymore. In response, Al From and the New Democrats became more aggressive in their

attempts to reform the party. In an approach that differed from most political scientists or

historians, these disgruntled Democrats blamed the messages and strategies of the party for its

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[35] Gephardt, "Democratic Leadership Council," C-SPAN.
[36] Baer, *Reinventing Democrats*, 78.
[37] Baer, *Reinventing Democrats*, 81.
[38] Gephardt, "Democratic Leadership Council," C-SPAN.

failures. They rarely addressed the contextual reasons why one election or another may have been lost. For the New Democrats, the rot was structural, and though they faced a diverse array of foes, Jesse Jackson most of all, they were determined to have their say in party affairs.

Figure 3: Jesse Jackson. *Biography.com*. 2019.

1988-1992: Moderates Triumphant

In 1988, the New Democrats, specifically some in the DLC, attempted to win the presidency. Richard "Dick" Gephardt and Al Gore ran for the nomination, but they split their Southern bases. As a result, Jesse Jackson and Michael Dukakis surpassed them.[39] Meanwhile,

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[39] Baer, *Reinventing Democrats*, 108.

another vaguely-neoliberal candidate, Colorado Senator Gary Hart, was the frontrunner for much

of 1987, but dropped out when a marital affair became the story of his campaign.[40] Other DLC

figures, either fearful of scrutiny towards their own lives or simply unwilling to run, stayed on

the sidelines. There was some talk of these figures that wondered if they were merely bad

candidates, but the DLC rarely used this argument. Given that it was an organization of

politicians, they were slow to criticize one another, and when they did, it was through innuendo

and almost never directly pointed at an individual.

It may seem that the DLC was somewhat irrelevant in the face of failing candidates, but

the truth was that the DLC had been biding its time. By 1988, the DLC had internalized the 1984

loss as other Democrats had, and they had forged a new path for the party through diplomacy and

sheer determination. Their attempts at outreach were wildly successful; more and more

Democrats felt comfortable joining the organization. The DLC had continued their rhetoric about

moderation, but in diplomatic terms within the party, it was careful[41]. This was a departure from

their strategy during its original founding, but since then, the DLC had weathered attacks from

all sides, and could not afford to risk any more.

As the DLC became more mainstream, however, both because politicians came to agree

with their outlook and because of their own attempts at moderation, they also faced an identity

crisis. Paul Kirk, the moderate DNC chair, was the loudest voice in questioning the DLC's

purpose. After all, if their ideas were being adopted in the party, why did the DLC exist?

Understanding this truth, the New Democrats in the DLC became adversarial again, deciding to

cultivate a renewed and poignant critique of the Democratic Party's strategies and policies.[42]

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[40] Nelson, *Clinton's Elections,* 3.
[41] Baer, *Reinventing Democrats*, 120.
[42] Baer, *Reinventing Democrats*, 121.

Though Gephardt's failure to win the nomination was a setback, the DLC observed the election quietly. They had already won some victories in their short existence, namely with the implementation of Super Tuesday. However, while most Democrats seemed satisfied with the party's progress on moderation, the DLC was not. They believed Super Tuesday would not give enough power to Southern Democrats, and that the party was still too liberal.[43] Their additional complaints were largely ignored. However, when Michael Dukakis, somewhat of a neoliberal himself, lost the election, the DLC exploded in popularity and influence. Dukakis's campaign faltered massively in an ad on tanks, which made Dukakis seem ridiculous. On the issue of competence, Bush dominated Dukakis, despite Dukakis's attempts.[44] Now, From and his colleagues knew, was the time to strike. One of their biggest attacks on party orthodoxy came in March 1989, in a series of speeches about the state of the party.

The most informative source was a discussion about party loss with various DLC members, Pennsylvania Democrats, and even the Democratic leaders of both chambers of Congress. As one of his introductory comments, Georgia Senator Sam Nunn argues that "we can all take pride in the DLC's emergence in the past few years as a catalyst for new thinking in our party and in our country".[45] Building on this, Nunn would continue to say that "...when our party fails in 5 of the last 6 presidential elections, we cannot continue to blame bad candidates, bad tactics, or just bad luck. It's deeper than that".[46] It is clear from this rhetoric that by 1988, the DLC had lost their fear of confrontation with the party, and was openly positioning itself as the only solution to its woes. Specifically, Nunn urges the party to adopt policies that "create opportunities for all, rather than entitlements for some". For most Democrats using such rhetoric,

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[43] Baer, *Reinventing Democrats*, 118.
[44] Nelson, *Clinton's Elections*, 13.
[45] Nunn, "Keynote Address," C-SPAN.
[46] Nunn, "Keynote Address," C-SPAN.

their target would probably be the wealthy, and yet Nunn's use of the term "entitlement" is interesting here because it seems to refer to welfare. It may even indicate a veiled attack on the policies of the New Left, which supported social policies and welfare spending for the disadvantaged. This theme of, as critics would say, quasi-Republican rhetoric would continue throughout much of Nunn's speech.

After Nunn, the second most notable speaker was William Galston. Galston's resume included serving as the policy advisor for Mondale in 1984, and he possessed a PhD in public policy from the University of Chicago. Given his expertise, the DLC invited him to this meeting to speak about the party's deficiencies. Echoing the DLC's aggressive stance after 1988, Galston argued that "For too long, we have been rearranging the furniture, while the foundation of our house has eroded. Rather than facing reality, we have embraced the politics of evasion. The result has been repeated defeat, and if we do not listen, and learn, and change, we will keep on losing".[47] While Galston specifically addresses policy issues, he also says the groups the Democrats appeal to must change, and therefore so must its policies. Galston calls for a renewed push to win white voters, lamenting that "if minorities and the poor had voted at national average rates in 1988, Michael Dukakis would still have lost the election by a wide margin". Galston's rhetoric here connects to the idea of a turn toward moderation. After all, he argued that winning Democrats would have to change the sorts of policies and groups they focused on to win back the famed lost white moderate voter.

In his speech, Galston focuses on national defense and crime more than any other issues. Contextually, this makes some sense; these were the issues that sunk Dukakis's campaign in

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[47] Nunn, "Keynote Address," C-SPAN.

1988.[48] However, in focusing on those issues, Galston bought into Republican framing of the national discussion. Although his rhetoric was clear in public and private spaces, it was clear that he had internalized Republican attacks as accurate. For example, Galston (among many others) partly attributed Dukakis's 1988 loss to his perceived weakness on crime in 1988. As a result, he asked "The American people overwhelmingly believe that the death penalty is the appropriate punishment for certain heinous crimes. Will our next nominee agree, or will he be on the defensive yet again?" On national security, Galston lambasted Dukakis and the Democrats, saying that "A substantial portion of the electorate had reached the conclusion that the Democratic nominee would actually weaken our national security. These issues turned out to be very important in the minds of crucial swing voters who eventually decided to support George Bush".[49] When he had finished his speech, the DLC members praised Galston, and agreed with nearly everything he had said. It was clear that, for them, Democratic losses were directly connected to the party's policy identifications.

On March 11th, 1989, a day after the previous source took place, the DLC conference continued with the inclusion of powerful party leaders. Some lesser known DLC or DLC-affiliated figures had a chance to make their voices heard at this part of the conference, but the main two speakers were the two Democratic leaders in Congress. Democratic House Speaker Jim Wright speaks, and though he is affiliated with the DLC here, his rhetoric is not as pointed as theirs. This could be explained by the fact that he is the speaker of the house, that he still has more liberal leanings, or both. Meanwhile, Democratic Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell

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[48] Baer, *Reinventing Democrats*, 125.
[49] Nunn, "Keynote Address," C-SPAN.

also speaks here, and though he is not a Southern Democrat, he espouses some New Democrat-friendly views.

For his part, Wright begins his speech discussing the perceived fractures in the Democratic Party. In language showing he is not a pure New Democrat, he notes that "I've been reading and hearing some commentary to the effect that we Democrats must choose between representing the underprivileged, the poor, including minorities of cities…on one hand, and representing middle income white and ethnic blue collar Americans on the other. Well, that is quite possibly the most foolish suggestion I've heard".[50] This may indicate that he disagrees with the traditional New Democratic arguments that white moderates need to be won back. Wright continues his veiled rebuke, explaining recent Democratic congressional victories by explaining that "It's because we've stayed close to the people…it had very little to do with public relations; it had a whole lot to do with performance. The best clean water bill, highway bill, trade bill…affordable housing bill, civil rights bill, a drug initiative…and welfare reform bill".[51] Notably, while he disagrees with some traditional DLC strategies here, he agrees with some of their issue emphases, such as drugs or welfare reform. He also later agrees with the idea of a national service program. Finally, perhaps in one of the best remarks demonstrating his differences with the DLC, Wright explains that "the social deficit…arises from the rising gap between rich and poor and the rising difficulty of average Americans to pay for basic things". This sort of rhetoric is almost anathema to New Democrats, and they will rarely (if ever) use such language.

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[50] Nunn, "Towards a New Democratic Agenda," C-SPAN.
[51] Nunn, "Towards a New Democratic Agenda," C-SPAN.

As he begins his speech, Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell immediately elucidates his differences with Wright. Interestingly, he did so not as a Southern Democrat but as a senator from Maine. He explains that "It's a tradition of the Democratic Party…to have an agenda for action. We need one now, because we're in a new era. The New Deal and the Reagan reaction to it are over". Though most of Mitchell's speech is dedicated to foreign policy, this one line is demonstrative of a wider framework that most politicians present at this event are thinking through. For Mitchell, the issues are important, but just as important is the idea of a new era emerging. Here, one of the most powerful Democrats in the country is declaring the New Deal party to be dead. Now, he argues, it is time for a new party agenda. When he talks about specific issue areas, Mitchell notes that "Democrats should focus on two objectives: first to focus on a bipartisan foreign policy, and second to establish a new social contract that defines not only what our government will do for its citizens, but what our citizens will do for its country".[52] This is somewhat nationalistic rhetoric that may have its origins in Republican attacks against Democrats for being weak on foreign policy in the 1988 election.

While Wright and Mitchell have some differences in their approach and agreement with the DLC, it is clear that both desire some form of change for the party, if for no other reason than to make it more successful. These figures come off as less ideological than the New Democrat regulars like Gephardt or Nunn, but this is likely a combination of their powerful positions necessitating careful rhetoric and the fact that this is not a group they founded (so therefore, they may not agree with its full platform). They are both committed to changes in the party, and though they do not necessarily mention electoral loss directly, both men imply that presidential

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[52] Nunn, "Towards a New Democratic Agenda," C-SPAN.

candidates should emulate the more successful congressional candidates, advocating changes based on electoral fortunes.

A year and five days after the Republicans routed the Dukakis campaign, the beleaguered Democrats faced a dilemma. Dukakis was somewhat neoliberal in his own right. He proclaimed "this election is about competence, not ideology", and one journalist observed he was running on "being the smartest clerk in the world".[53] His lack of liberal ideology and identification as an intellectual did him no good; he had failed to win average Americans to his cause. Worse, at least for the New Democrats, was that the failed 1988 Democratic platform was essentially a dream come true. It was almost 10x smaller than the party's 1984 platform, and as political scientist Gerald Pomper noted, "The party platform demonstrated that electoral victory was the predominant consideration".[54] This focus on victory at any cost was what the DLC had been begging for for years. It was an ideal platform for them, but it had failed to win Dukakis the White House.

To New Democrats, Dukakis had brought the party closer to their goals, but failed to go far enough in their eyes. In fact, the DLC and New Democrats as a whole viewed the loss not as a repudiation of their strategy, but as an indication that they needed to be even more boisterous. Perhaps William Galston put the faction's disappointment best when he observed that Dukakis should have been a more successful candidate against Bush, given his higher poll numbers and supposed party unification. Furthermore, Bush was a much weaker candidate than Reagan had been. Galston, along with the DLC, concluded that Dukakis had not sufficiently won back the groups the Democrats had lost since 1968, which mainly included white working-class voters.[55]

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[53] Baer, *Reinventing Democrats*, 122.
[54] Baer, *Reinventing Democrats*, 115.
[55] Baer, *Reinventing Democrats*, 124.

While the results of 1988 worried the DLC, they saw a potential advantage in the results

of 1988. One could argue their two main affiliated candidates in the 1988 primary, Dick

Gephardt and Al Gore, each took a portion of the supporters that, put together, could propel them

to higher odds of victory. Moreover, other Democrats began to gravitate towards the New

Democratic alarm about Democratic losses. A former official of Jimmy Carter, for example,

noted that Democrats would have to rethink their positions on crime, race, and foreign policy,

issues the DLC had called for changes on for years.[56] What this meant in reality is that the DLC

took the support of minority groups for granted. These groups could not win Democrats the

presidency in the DLC's eyes, nor could women. Instead, the DLC was ultimately focused on

appealing to blue collar whites that the party lost in the 1960s and 1970s. This focus also reflects

some issues I included in my earlier table, with the most frequent rhetoric in these speeches

(besides economics) being about crime, race (indirectly through innuendos), and foreign policy.

They did not focus on offering olive branches to Democratic bulwarks; they were chasing voters

in the center. On November 13th, 1989, the DLC held a conference to discuss these changes and

the wider issues of the party, aiming their message to a much more receptive audience.

When Dick Gephardt spoke at the DLC conference, he echoed rhetoric that had become

increasingly popular in the party, now seen in both public and private spaces. Beginning his

speech by calling for "...the ability to change, adapt, lead", he would later elaborate on this by

saying that "As Democrats, we must be willing to continue to lead…by continuing to cut

wasteful and outdated programs".[57] This may have been a response to Republican "welfare

queen" rhetoric that demonized recipients of welfare programs. When Gephardt proclaimed that

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[56] Baer, *Reinventing Democrats*, 126.
[57] Gephardt, "Challenges Facing Congress," C-SPAN.

"Democrats are not shackled by…rigidity. We are pragmatists", he echoed the sentiments of many prominent Democrats, even those who opposed the DLC, such as new DNC chairman Ronald Brown. Brown opined that Democrats should follow a "pragmatic and commonsense approach" to win over "those voters in the middle of the political spectrum".[58] It was clear that electoral losses had thrust the DLC and the New Democrats into prominence in the party.

Another significant speaker was the new Democratic Governor of Virginia, Doug Wilder. Wilder's language was in line with many of his contemporaries, and as a New Democrat in the South, this made sense. However, his articulation of why he believed he had won in Virginia makes him a noteworthy inclusion. Wilder started by explaining "It is very good to briefly discuss…the future of the Democratic Party. Of course, some look to the recent past, to the one loss record, of our national party, and predict a gloomy future for us. I believe otherwise…I think the future bodes well". Wilder viewed the Virginia example as a model for future success, saying "...Virginians would not be deterred by the past and that they would not wallow in the past. Democratic leaders across this nation must themselves now look to the future. To win in the years ahead, we must offer a message that looks ahead".[59] This rhetoric of change and appealing to broader swathes of Americans is nothing new. However, as support for the DLC swelled, it was figures like Wilder who called for the Democrats to "take a plunge into the waters of America's new mainstream".

With newfound support in the party, the DLC had also won gains on other fronts. A new manifesto for the DLC, written by William Galston and entitled "The Politics of Evasion", set forth a number of strategies that would essentially copy his rhetoric from his earlier speech. In

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[58] Baer, *Reinventing Democrats*, 128.
[59] Gephardt, "Challenges Facing Congress," C-SPAN.

addition, the creation of a new think tank, the Progressive Policy Institute, gave the DLC a way to craft sophisticated new policy alternatives to the Democratic mainstream. What the DLC needed most by 1989 was a leader, a figure able to unite the country around a New Democratic vision. Of course, such a figure would first have to carefully court the groups the DLC had dismissed for years as unimportant, which included women and people of color. They would also have to be able to win the same moderates the DLC pursued.

Concluding the Analysis

As the national Democratic Party stumbled through the 1980s, one group consistently and (mostly) uncompromisingly called for a new direction. Al From and Gillis Long, alarmed at the loss in 1980 and pursuing their own political gains, called for a moderation in the party. In turn, this would give more power back to party leaders like Long and hopefully ensure a political future for Southern Democrats. Long would not live to see his dream come true, but the fear that ebbed from the 1984 presidential loss inspired the continuation of his vision. From quickly became involved in the new DLC, which emerged as an ideological successor to Long's various groups. The DLC and the now-forming New Democrat faction increasingly fought for a moderation of the party. In their view, Democrats had become beholden to special interests, namely single-issue activists, who did not represent the mainstream American voter.

By 1988, the DLC had experienced mixed successes. Following the loss of Michael Dukakis, however, they finally gained the respect and even allegiance of Democrats who had previously regarded them with skepticism. Notably, strong proponents of other factions like Jesse Jackson refrained from this, but even Jackson attended DLC meetings to promote party unity in this period. The DLC's endless alarmism had given them legitimacy in the eyes of other Democrats, who now saw the same losses and weaknesses the DLC did. By 1992, the DLC had

found a new golden candidate, who they believed could finally bring the vision of Long, Gephardt, Robb, and many others to bear. It was time for William Jefferson Clinton, soon known as "The Comeback Kid", to shine. In the final chapter, I will finish this story and delve into my findings in the project, as well as the wider significance of those discoveries.

Conclusion

Bill Clinton became a Democratic superstar in 1992, making the 1990s an exciting time for the DLC. During Clinton's presidency, the organization and its members stood at the height of their influence. Southern Democrats, such as Clinton and Gillis Long, dominated organizations like the CPE and DLC. Now, the president and vice president were both Southern Democrats, further demonstrating the importance of that group in New Democratic history. Meanwhile, the most significant DLC proposal came to fruition in the form of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). This policy, in addition to others such as criminal justice and welfare reform, gave the DLC hope that its goals for Democrats and the country would finally be achieved. However, not all would go as planned.[1]

Despite its victory, the DLC still had to overcome public perceptions of its usefulness. The circumstances of Clinton's election, especially the presence of strong third party challenger Ross Perot, led some to conclude that Clinton only won because of a split vote. However, research has since disproved this claim.[2] In lieu of Perot, many of his voters would have voted for one of the major candidates. Among those voters, support for Bush and Clinton was roughly equal. The rest would not have voted.[3] Meanwhile, Clinton overperformed in Southern states. These voters showed that DLC arguments about moderation as a strategy to win back such states may have had some credibility. The DLC also had to overcome Clinton and Gore's own independent policy desires, which sometimes diverged from the DLC mainstream. Clinton

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[1] Jason Stahl, *Right Moves: the Conservative Think Tank in American Political Culture since 1945* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 150.
[2] Nelson, *Clinton's Elections*, 156.
[3] Nelson, *Clinton's Elections,* 157.

quickly prioritized military service for the LGBTQ community and government-based health

care, which the DLC considered concessions to special interests and large governments.

It was not the last time the DLC struggled with Democratic leaders. In 2000, Al Gore

decided to largely abandon the DLC and instead run a more liberal campaign. Embittered, the

DLC blamed Gore's loss on his repudiation of the DLC strategy. Whether these accusations were

true or not, the split damaged the organization's place within the party.[4] In 2004, the DLC

became even more irrelevant when none of the Democratic candidates came to its convention

that year.[5] When Barack Obama was told in a 2003 interview that he had been added to the

"DLC list of 100 rising stars", Obama replied that he "did not view such inclusion as an

endorsement on my part of the DLC platform".[6] It would only be the beginning of a tense

relationship between the DLC and the future-president, one that would eventually help sideline

the organization and bring it to its end in 2011 following a lack of funds and a similar lack of

political relevance.

Previously, scholarship on this topic has revolved around "Culture War" narratives about

election loss, or the fundamentals of elections. However, few have dealt with the connections

between election loss and party transformation in a way that ties the two together so directly.

Usually, scholars blame external factors. Instead, this project was an attempt to establish a

connection between the historical context of the culture war and an analysis of election loss in

the 1980s Democratic Party. In this project, I was able to demonstrate a direct link between

electoral losses at the presidential level and changes in rhetoric and strategy within the party. Of

course, there were limitations in the research. One can only establish so much with a discourse

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[4] Morris Fiorina, Samuel Abrams, and Jeremy Pope, "The 2000 U.S. Presidential Election: Can Retrospective Voting Be Saved?," University of Vermont (British Journal of Political Science, April 2003).
[5] Ari Berman, "Going Nowhere," The Nation, June 29, 2015.
[6] Berman, "Going Nowhere".

analysis method, while there is a direct link between losses and party changes, it should never be understood as the only link.

As time passed, New Democrats repeatedly and more pressingly stressed that electoral losses prompted their efforts. This is demonstrated in each of the sources, which shows a call for change that was not only present but growing. It was the demoralizing loss of Carter in 1980, the humiliating loss of Mondale in 1984, and the confusing loss of Dukakis in 1988 that drove worried party leaders to call for substantial changes in party politics and policy. Through the case studies and my table, which I used to organize and loosely categorize rhetoric, I found growing and desperate calls for change in the Democratic Party. Their desperation came from the fear that they would lose unless the party became more moderate. For a time, their critiques were proven correct; Democrats won the White House again in the 1990s and would win again in 2008. However, in a cruel twist of fate, many of these same Southern Democrats lost their seats in the Republican waves in Congress in this period. The DLC's strategy could not save them.

Part of the utility of a project such as this one is that it has modern implications. Rhetorically, ideas about moderation lived on in Al Gore's 2000 campaign, such as in the idea of private retirement accounts outside social security.[7] They would do so to a lesser extent in John Kerry's 2004 campaign, at least on education issues.[8] Both men snubbed the DLC, Gore by refusing to adopt their strategy and Kerry by intentionally skipping the DLC's conference in 2003. In 2008, Barack Obama outright shunned the DLC, but many of his policies and rhetoric followed the New Democrats from the 1980s and 1990s. For example, his 2008 healthcare plan fell short of earlier Democratic calls for universal healthcare pre-1980s. Instead, it was somewhat

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[7] Mark Penn, "The Democrats' Next Step," The American Prospect, December 19, 2001.
[8] David Corn, "Defining John Kerry," The Nation, June 29, 2015.

similar to the Clinton and DLC plan of the 1990s, which ultimately preserved private insurance companies.[9]

Although many New Democrats have moved on in their lives, others have anchored themselves in the party, and the reforms of the 1980s and 1990s still shape the party today. As recently as 2016, Hillary Clinton unsuccessfully pursued the presidency as the Democratic nominee. Her loss came about for a variety of reasons, but one was her strategy. In fact, her campaign rhetoric would not always reflect her husband's rhetoric, but it still contained New Democratic influences. This was especially evident in her push for a "Trans-Pacific Partnership", a policy similar to NAFTA. It also became apparent in the groups Democrats targeted in that election (largely suburban voters and moderates, as a quote from Chuck Schumer will illustrate later).

Overall, 2016 was a last hurrah for many aging veterans of the old Clinton machine from 1992. It also represented a triumph for women in the party, who had sought a female nominee for decades. Even after that election, many prominent New Democrats or affiliated figures remain in power. Steny Hoyer, who contributed to Gillis Long's manifestos, is now the second most powerful Democrat in the House. This leadership comes 40 years after Long published Rebuilding the Road to Opportunity in 1982. Overall, House Democratic leadership is much older than its Republican counterparts, reflecting an attempt to hold on by many original New Democrats.[10] While the DLC itself ceased to exist in 2011, the ideals of its founding members lived on in the Progressive Policy Institute (PPI). The PPI, the DLC's think-tank, exists to this

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[9] Abigail Abrams, "Medicare for All's Surprising Origins in Health Care," Time (Time, May 30, 2019).
[10] Kevin Schaul and Kevin Uhrnacher, "Democrats' Generational Gap Grows with Return of Speaker Pelosi and Longtime Deputies," The Washington Post (WP Company, January 3, 2019).

day, and serves to promote centrism and pro-business economic policy specifically within the party. However, it lacks the influence it once had.

DLC ideals and goals remain entrenched in the party. For instance, President Biden supports the TPP, although his support would come with the important caveat of adding more labor and environmental regulations to it. Still, this policy is a continuation of Biden's support for NAFTA in the 1990s, a time when he also supported welfare reform and the repeal of the Glass-Steagall Act.[11] It is a testament to progressive pressure that Biden has now changed his positions on some of these issues.

Strategically, many leading Democrats still have the goal of winning over average Americans, who they often assume to be moderate. Chuck Schumer, leader of the Senate Democrats, famously proclaimed in 2016 that "For every blue-collar Democrat we lose in western Pennsylvania, we will pick up two moderate Republicans in the suburbs in Philadelphia, and you can repeat that in Ohio and Illinois and Wisconsin".[12] While the party's strategy may be similar, it is clear that the strategic outlook for its approach is not. The strategy failed to win Clinton the White House in 2016, although there are many notable factors that drove her loss, including her gender. Joseph Biden's 2020 campaign took various lessons from this loss in pursuit of his eventual victory. However, it is unclear how important a role mere negative partisanship, opposition to Donald Trump, and the COVID-19 pandemic played.

There are also challenges to the DLC paradigm within the Democratic Party. The relative success of previously little-known and independent Bernie Sanders is a testament to that fact. His campaigns for the nomination in 2016 and 2020 demonstrated that many of the party's voters, at

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[11] James McBride, Andrew Chatzky, and Anshu Siripurapu, "What's next for the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)?," Council on Foreign Relations (Council on Foreign Relations, September 20, 2021).

[12] Chuck Schumer, "Senator Chuck Schumer and Robby Mook Discuss Campaign 2016," C-SPAN, July 28, 2016.

least, if not the country, want to take the Democrats in a different direction. Moreover, the recent victories of candidates such as Alexandria Occasio-Cortez show the growth of a new faction that emphasizes the positive role that the government can play. However, the legacy of the DLC still inhibits candidates such as Sanders and Occasio-Cortez. The largest hurdle on the presidential level comes from the Super Tuesday system that the New Democrats championed. It favors more conservative (at least traditionally) Southern states and gives moderate candidates a head start to the primary process. Just as crucially, the superdelegate process gave Hillary Clinton a seemingly insurmountable lead in 2016, with most superdelegates supporting her campaign. These have been weakened in reforms since then, but the fact remains that party leaders have an important role to play in the nomination process.

The question of presidential election losses that lead to changes in political party or faction strategy should be further investigated. One could also look to the congressional level for evidence of election losses inspiring change. Examples of interesting topics would be the Democrats from 1890-1932 and the Republicans from 1932-1968. In addition to the period in the mid 1900s, one could also look at 1980, 1994, and more for glimpses into how the Republican Party has shifted to become what it is today. A study of this would be especially interesting, because it helps explain the changes I discuss in this project. After all, it was a resurgent Republican Party that captivated American minds in the 1970s and 1980s and won the White House for a generation. The Democrats, forced to respond to what appeared to be a new era of politics, struggled to adapt. Any project connecting the two periods would surpass this project in both scope and capacity for conclusion.

The origins of this project come from the present day. The Democratic Party faces a new set of challenges for the twenty-first century. From climate change to economic inequality, it

seems apparent that Democrats (and Republicans) will have to change to meet the moment. This project demonstrated that election losses can inspire worried factions of a party to take it over and move it in a different, possibly more successful direction. As the Democrats have not experienced a series of consecutive losses at the time of this project's creation, many in the party will question the necessity of change. However, if Democrats fail to heed the same calls for change and reform that swept the party in the 1980s, they may be dismayed to see the dire consequences for their party or, worse, the country.

Annotated Bibliography

Annotated Primary Sources

Beckel, Robert. "Why Democrats Have Failed to Win White House," C-SPAN. November 18, 1988.

> On November 18th, 1988, the *Washington Times* sponsored a Democratic Party
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> discussion about why the Democrats failed to win the White House. The source deals
>
> directly with my topic, so I expect that it will be one of the most helpful sources I use
>
> overall in terms of connecting electoral losses to a perceived need to change the
>
> Democratic Party's policies. Guests included Virginia Senator elect Chuck Robb,
>
> Vermont Senator Patrick Leahy, and former DNC chairman Charles Nat. The main guest
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> I am looking at, among these other figures, is Robert Beckel, who was a Democratic
>
> Political Consultant. His presence here is interesting as he is not an oft-present figure in
>
> these sorts of discussions, so I am curious about what he has to say. A Democratic
>
> consultant may have different views than politicians, or he may articulate the same views
>
> from a different perspective. That is what I hope to determine with this source.

Berman, Ari. "Going Nowhere." The Nation, March 3, 2005.

> Ari Berman was formerly a senior writer for The Nation magazine, writing on various
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> political issues in the American context, though he placed specific emphasis on money in
>
> politics in his work. In this article, Berman discusses the decline of the DLC in the early
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> 2000's, noting that few paid the organization much mind by 2003. Further, and most
>
> importantly for my work, the article hones in on the reactions of one Barack Obama
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> towards the DLC in this period, which is notably before his rise to the presidency in
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> 2008. Therefore, it is a sort of prelude to how Obama would treat the DLC in his time as

president, and one could see that he had a sense of disregard towards them even before his race against Hillary Clinton. Because few other sources discuss Obama's reactions to the DLC in such depth, this is a crucial source for me in my last chapter.

Cockburn, Alexander, and Robert Pollin. "How to Talk About Economic Strategy." The Nation, February 28, 1987.

Alexander Cockburn and Robert Pollin's article in *The Nation* is about the DLC, describing them as a loud and powerful faction influencing the Democratic Party. The authors have no qualms in lambasting the policies and rhetoric of the DLC in this article. For example, they note that there is a flaw in the DLC's analysis of politics in terms of consumption binges. It is clear that they are biased against the group, but the source is still useful for my analysis because of the brief discussion it has on election losses.

From, Al and Gillis Long, *Rebuilding the Road to Opportunity*. National House Democratic Caucus, 1982.

After Jimmy Carter's loss in the 1980 election, Al From and Gillis Long collaborated to create a manifesto of sorts for their wing of the Democratic Party. Essentially, anyone wishing to take the party in a more 'moderate' direction could look to this document as a guide for what sorts of policies the party should adopt. Readers could also see how the 'moderation' would be achieved. Essentially, the source is the direct words of two of the founding figures of the 'New Democrat' movement, and I believe it will include rhetoric about the 1980 loss that demonstrates Long and From's belief that policy changes must come as a result of that loss.

From, Al and Gillis Long, *Renewing America's Promise*. National House Democratic Caucus, 1984.

This source comes as a sequel of sorts to From and Long's previous manifesto, and it is

fairly similar in composition. However, by 1984, the 'New Democrats' had put together a

much more coherent vision for how they believed the party needed to change, and this

source reflects that. It was written before the 1984 election, so the authors are still

responding to the 1980 loss in a way, but it will reflect how much Long and From have

changed their approaches in two years, if at all.

Gephardt, Richard. "Challenges Facing Congress," C-SPAN. November 13, 1989

This is footage of a DLC Fall Conference in 1989. DLC members held this conference in

part as a response to the 1988 election and as seen in the title, they hoped to hold

discussions of the challenges facing Democratic Congress at that point. The speakers

include some of the same Democrats who founded the DLC in part because they were

worried about losing their gubernatorial or congressional seats if they were tied to a

national party they saw as too liberal. Richard Gephardt is one example of these types of

Democrats, and he is perhaps the main speaker I will be looking at in the footage. This is

because he was the first chair of the DLC. Though he was no longer the chair in 1989, he

was still one of its most important members.

Gephardt, Richard. "Democratic Leadership Council," C-SPAN. December 12, 1986.

This source is somewhat unique among my DLC sources in that it focuses only on

Richard Gephardt, who had recently chaired the DLC at this time. He answers the

interviewer's questions as well as questions from the audience about the DLC, their

policy stances, and their views on other factions of the Democratic Party. The source

comes from the early era of the DLC, fresh after the loss in 1985, so the perspectives

coming from this source will likely be different from the sources I have from 1988 or

1989.

Long, Gillis. "Democratic National Party," C-SPAN. June 25, 1984.

Gillis Long gives an interview about the state of the Democratic Party in this source. His

views as a so-called 'National Democrat from the South' reflect the views of many of his

colleagues, and I expect that this source will demonstrate that he is worried about how

liberal the Democratic Party has become, despite sharing many of the mainstream party's

policy ideals. As Long was one of the main trail blazers in moving the Democrats in a

'moderate' direction, the interview will likely reflect this desire for moderation.

Fiorina, Morris, Samuel Abrams, and Jeremy Pope. "The 2000 U.S. Presidential Election: Can
Retrospective Voting Be Saved?" University of Vermont. British Journal of Political
Science, April 2003.

Morris Fiorina and Jeremy Pope were Political Science professors who taught at Stanford

University at the time this article was written. Information on Samuel Abrams is more

difficult to find, but it seems that he was a student at the time. Collectively, the three

figures have decades of experience in the realm of Political Science research between

them, and their study here is just another example of this work. The work here is about Al

Gore, and there is a careful consideration for the main reasons cited for his defeat. The

source is more data driven than most of my other sources, and perhaps less accessible to a

layman, but it is useful for understanding the history of this period from a different

perspective. The data-driven approach and the dive into the reasons for why Gore lost is

what makes this an important addition to my work here.

Nunn, Samuel. "Keynote Address," C-SPAN. March 10, 1989.

In what would become an almost three hour recording, C-SPAN filmed a DLC

conference in which Sam Nunn, the Democratic Senator of Georgia, would give a speech

as the keynote address. Notably, many others also spoke at this time, the most important

of whom was William Galston. Galston is one of the authors I've consulted for

information about my project and he was an expert on the topic of Democratic policy

even in the 1980s, to the extent that the DLC brought him in to hear his expertise. In

general, many figures in the speech talk about the need to reform the party based on

previous electoral losses, as well as the general notion that they had lost the American

people's support. I expect this source to be a goldmine of information for me given its

focus on Democratic losses and its sheer length.

Nunn, Samuel. "Towards a New Democratic Agenda," C-SPAN. March 11, 1989.

This is a DLC-led roundtable discussion in Philadelphia, and its topic is the possibility of

a new Democratic agenda, as the title suggests.What this means in the context of the

speech is that it is similar to the "Challenges Facing Congress" speeches. Both sources

involve steps the Democrats were discussing to deal with the loss in 1988, and in this

specific source, the Democrats are discussing new policy alternatives to help their party

win once again. Since it is about winning, I think it is obvious that it will be a great

source for me to use. Samuel Nunn was one of the main speakers at this event, and Nunn

served as the chair of the DLC at this point in its history. Therefore, I hope that he will

provide some insight into what the 'New Democrats' were thinking at this point.

Penn, Mark. "The Democrats' Next Step." The American Prospect, December 19, 2001.

Mark Penn is a pollster, businessman, and political strategist who graduated from

Harvard University with a degree in Political Science. Since that time he has worked

closely with figures such as Bill Clinton and Tony Blair. This article is largely a debate

between Penn and Guy Molyneux, who takes an oppositional stance to Penn's more

centrist positions within the article. In fact, it is important to note these biases, as Penn

makes no effort to hide his blatantly centrist positions in this article or his other work, but

if one understands these biases, his polling insights are valuable. This source can help me

because it is a primary source showing me the arguments that went on after the 2000

election, mostly concerning why Democrats lost and what they should do better next

time. Understanding these views is important to understanding how the DLC itself

reacted, as most of their positions were in line with Penn at the time.

Taylor, Paul. "Democrats' New Centrists Preen for '88." The Washington Post. WP Company, November 10, 1985.

Paul Taylor is a journalist who worked at the *Washington Post* for several years before he

wrote this article. Taylor is best known for his work questioning Gary Hart's adultery,

which drove Hart out of the 1988 race. However, for my purposes, his article is helpful as

a primary source. Taylor wrote the article in 1985, and his argument is that there were

many centrist Democrats positioning themselves for 1988 by traveling around the

country. This group included (among others) Sam Nunn, Joe Biden, Bill Clinton, Richard

Gephardt, and Chuck Robb. The utility of including newspaper sources like this in my

project is twofold. They are windows into the 1980s, and they are also typically outside

perspectives on the political matters they deal with. This is helpful with bias and in

visualizing events like the formation of the DLC with fresh eyes.

Annotated Secondary Sources

Andelic, Patrick. *Donkey Work: Congressional Democrats in Conservative America, 1974-1994*.
University Press of Kansas, 2019.

Patrick Andelic is a British History lecturer at Northumbria University in Newcastle upon

Tyne, United Kingdom. He specializes in American history, specifically the subject of

20th-century liberalism and the Democratic Party. His work *Donkey Work* encompasses

the history of the Democratic Party between 1974 and 1994. This was a period of

significant changes in the Democratic Party as it struggled to find a new identity in the

face of a resurgent Republican Party. The subject of the work is slightly different from

my own, in that it focuses mainly on Democrats in Congress, while my work is on the

presidential level. However, the book is beneficial because the Congressional Democrats

are also part of my story as well. The author's primary argument is that Democratic

strength at the congressional level eliminated the necessity for a Democratic rebirth on

the scale of the Republican Party, which completely rebuilt itself after devastating losses

in the mid-1900s. This is similar to other arguments that a Republican rebirth in the

intellectual sphere helped them gain an edge over the Democratic Party.

Baer, Kenneth S. *Reinventing Democrats: The Politics of Liberalism from Reagan to Clinton*.
Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000.

Kenneth S. Baer's *Reinventing Democrats* is an easily accessible and worthwhile tome on

the transformations in the Democratic Party in the last quarter of the twentieth-century.

Baer draws on his expertise as a Professor of Politics, as well as his connections to Al

From, Bill Clinton, and other Democratic political titans of the era to create a helpful

work related to my topic. The book describes the factional infighting that took place in

the Democratic Party after 1968, particularly between old New Deal Democrats, the so-

called 'New Left' liberals that emerged from the campaigns of George McGovern and

Robert Kennedy, and the 'New Democrats'. The 'New Democrats' were a group of

dissatisfied and worried Southern Democrats and neoliberals who saw a Democratic

Party that had drifted away from their views - and those of their constituents. Scholars

might note his access and association with major 'New Democrats' is as much a liability

as a strength; some may regard his work as biased towards such figures. However, the

research and knowledge he adds to the field is also helpful for my project, especially in

the personal interviews he conducts with many prominent figures from this era, such as

Al From.

Bloom, Jack M., and Richard G. Hatcher. *Class, Race, and the Civil Rights Movement*.
    Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019.

Jack Bloom is an Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Indiana. His work

in *Class, Race, and the Civil Rights Movement* concerns the South, the Civil Rights

Movement, and how economic, social, and political factors played a role in these events.

Specifically, he argues the economic and political systems in the South at the time led to

discrimination. For the purposes of the research here, it was only necessary to note his

commentary on the ADA, which was one of the DLC's early rivals. The content is easy

to read, though beyond the ADA, it is not relevant to the time period in question, in terms

of the 1980s. Reviewers agree that his factoring of class into the discussion of race in the

South is an important contribution to the subject, but Bloom does not engage in the

debates about the Democratic Party's transformation the other sources engage in.

Galston, William A. "The Future of the Democratic Party." *The Brookings Review* 3, no. 2
    (1985): 16–24.

William Galston is a former Professor of Political Science and currently a senior fellow at

the Brookings Institution. One topic Galston specializes in is political institutions, namely

parties. In his article, Galston argues that 1984 represents a sea change in American

politics. Galston argues the Democrats are no longer the party of the majority; they had

lost this position with voters in a slow but sure drift that could not be easily reversed.

Since the source is about the 1984 election and its aftermath, its utility to my paper is

clear. Through him, I can find more information on the arguments scholars made at the

time, as well as actual information on the events surrounding 1984. His source is useful,

but may suffer from bias. Galston would go on to work for the Clinton administration a

decade after writing this, and his arguments make it clear he is likely a Democrat, though

he manages to remain more objective on who he sides with in the party.

Jr, Pitney John J. *After Reagan: Bush, Dukakis, and the 1988 Election*. University Press of
Kansas, 2019.

John J. Pitney Jr. is an American Political Scientist, teaching at Claremont McKenna

College. His work specializing in topics such as the 1988 election culminated in his work

After Reagan: Bush, Dukakis, and the 1988 Election. In this work, he describes the

primaries and general election in 1988 in considerable detail, leaving readers with a much

greater sense of why the Republicans were able to triumph over a seemingly confused

Democratic Party. However, it is important to note that Pitney was an open Republican

until 2016, and this association shows in his work, particularly in his descriptions of

Democratic candidates. He seems to describe these candidates as more liberal than other

sources about the same period, but this does not hinder his ability to grasp the nuances

between the candidates, so long as the reader understands where he is coming from. His

work is critical to my research because of his expertise on the 1988 election and his own research into how the events played out.

Lepore, Jill. *These Truths: A History of the United States*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2019.

Jill Lepore's *These Truths* offers a winding account of American history from a historian's viewpoint. She is the David Woods Kemper 41' Professor of American History at Harvard University, and also serves as a journalist at *The New Yorker*. Lepore's arguments in *These Truths*, as they pertain to my topic, involve discussions of the developments in the Democratic Party from a wide viewpoint, focused mainly on social issues. There is a significant discussion of abortion, for example, and Lepore argues that Americans' perception Democrats were out of touch on such social issues was what caused them so much trouble in the 1980s. She also discusses the resurgent conservative movement and how they played a role in Democratic losses. I cannot use her whole book because it is too broadly focused for my topic. However, in the sections she talks about my topic, she includes practical information about the Democratic Party in the 1980s from a different perspective than many Political Scientists, although by her own admission, she incorporates both politics and history into her work.

Maney, Patrick J. *Bill Clinton: New Gilded Age President*. University Press of Kansas, 2016.

Serving as a Professor of History at Boston College, Patrick J. Maney's work offers a welcome addition to my project. His work, *Bill Clinton: New Gilded Age President*, is mostly focused on Bill Clinton, but there are times when he discusses wider trends in the Democratic Party and the country at large. Maney argues Clinton was the quintessential 'New Democrat', and that his efforts to win the White House back for Democrats helped

inspire a transformation in the party. Maney's book is a superb source for me, although I have not consulted it as much as other sources, given its primary focus on the 1990s. Still, it makes for a worthwhile addition to the collection.

Masket, Seth. *Learning from Loss: The Democrats, 2016-2020*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.

Seth Masket is a Political Science Professor at the University of Denver. He specializes in American elections, political parties, campaigns, and other aspects of American politics. I am specifically interested in his work *Learning from Loss: The Democrats 2016-2020*, because the work focuses on how the Democrats responded to electoral loss on the presidential level in 2016. His argument is that in response to the loss, party leaders and activists alike went through a process of soul-searching and course correction they believed was necessary for victory, and that this process ultimately culminated in the party's nomination of Joe Biden in 2020. Though this is not my time period, the methods of studying how Democrats reacted to their loss in 2016 are extremely useful, as is his discussion of narratives surrounding electoral loss. The book is a gem for me because I can look at his methods of research, discover what he himself said about the 1980s, and use it as a framework to understand how political parties (specifically the Democrats) react to election losses.

Mudge, Stephanie L. *Leftism Reinvented: Western Parties From Socialism to neoliberalism*. Harvard University Press, 2018.

Stephanie L. Mudge is an Associate Professor of Sociology, teaching at the University of California, Davis. Mudge's expertise in politics and economics only enhances her work in *Leftism Reinvented: Western Parties From Socialist to neoliberalism*. Her book

describes the relationship between politics and economics, specifically how economics (the rise of neoliberalism) helped change left-wing parties all over the world, including the Democratic Party. It is this discussion of the Democratic Party that is so valuable; her work takes a new critical perspective at movements many other scholars view as positive. Though Mudge acknowledges the strategies Democrats employed at the time helped them win, she questions the cost of these victories. Some scholars might note that she takes a more left-wing stance than many of her contemporaries, and one could question the influence of this in her work. Regardless though, her perspective is critically important in a field where praise is abundant for groups like the DLC, as well as figures such as Al From, or where criticism is often couched in terms of the American political overton window.

Nelson, Michael. *Clinton's Elections: 1992, 1996, and the Birth of a New Era of Governance*. University Press of Kansas, 2020.

Michael Nelson is an American Political Science Professor whose most recent position is at the University of Virginia. He specializes in presidential elections, the presidency, and political parties, and his twenty other books on similar topics complemented his work here. The work *Clinton's Elections: 1992, 1996, and the Birth of a New Era of Governance* is mainly concerned with the powerful influence of Bill Clinton in American politics in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s. Through following Clinton, Nelson also discusses the 'New Democrats' - mostly the DLC - in great depth, and can articulate why the two (Clinton and the 'New Democrats') were so successful, particularly in 1992. His valuable insight into the 1992 election has been especially helpful in my research moving forward.

Rae, Nicol C. *Southern Democrats*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

> Nicol C. Rae is a Professor of Politics and International Relations at the Florida
> International University. His work on American politics in the late-twentieth century
> helps support his expertise in *Southern Democrats*. This is a work in which Rae describes
> the plight of Southern Democrats who struggled with their continued allegiance to the
> Democratic Party in the 1950s and 60s. The book describes how some of these
> Democrats opted to create the DLC or other similar organizations, while others became
> Republicans, and how in some situations, both cases were true. It is important work
> because Rae dedicates whole sections of his book to discussing the transformation of the
> Democratic Party in the 1980s, which is obviously pivotal to his work. Though it is more
> broadly focused than the work of Michael Nelson, Rae can focus on my subject areas
> with more frequency than many of my other sources. Therefore, our shared beliefs
> regarding the importance of 'New Democrats' beyond Bill Clinton make this a great
> source for me to use.

Ribuffo, Leo P. "From Carter to Clinton: The Latest Crisis of American Liberalism." *American Studies International* 35, no. 2 (1997): 4–29.

> The American historian Leo P. Ribuffo was a specialist in American political history at
> George Washington University. His work largely concerned the resurgence of the right in
> America in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. For my purposes, his journal article about the era
> ranging from Carter to Clinton is important because it details the challenges the
> Democratic Party faced at the time. Specifically, Ribuffo discusses the shifts in the
> aforementioned party in the wake of the Cold War, 'Stagflation', and a reinvigorated
> Republican Party. His discussion of various subjects, from the DLC to the 'New Left' to

the Clinton Administration, makes it a useful piece for this project. The source is highly

engaging for any reader, though Ribuffo has a tendency to drift too heavily into details

sometimes in a way that may confuse casual readers. Overall, the source informs readers

about the period my project focuses on, and therefore it represents an excellent addition.

Riley, Russell L. *Inside the Clinton White House: An Oral History*. Oxford University Press, 2018.

At the University of Virginia, Russell Riley serves as a Professor of Ethics and

Institution, as well as the co-chair of the UVA-affiliated Miller Center's Presidential Oral

History Program. His specialty involves the study of recent U.S. presidents, from Jimmy

Carter to George W. Bush. His work *Inside the Clinton White House: An Oral History* is

the latest example of Riley's work on elite oral history, and it details Clinton's potential

presidential run in 1988, his successful run in 1992, and his time in the White House

thereafter. It is useful for my purposes, then, because I can glean yet another perspective

on Bill Clinton from a different historical standpoint. The source is fairly accessible and

offers some unique perspectives on Bill Clinton through oral historical methods. As a

leader for the William J. Clinton Presidential History Project and someone with over

1,500 hours of experience in oral interviews, I am confident his credentials are more than

enough to make his work worth consulting, and it is unclear whether he has any major

biases in his work.

Rochon, Thomas R., and Ravi Roy. "Adaptation of the American Democratic Party in an Era of Globalization." *International Journal of Political Economy* 31, no. 3 (December 8, 2014): 12–32.

Ravi Roy is an Associate Professor of Political Science and now a Senior Research

Fellow at the W. Edwards Deming Institute, and Thomas R. Rochon is a former Political

Science Professor who now heads the non-profit Educational Records Bureau. The two

collaborated in an article entitled "Adaptation of the American Democratic Party in an

Era of Globalization", in which the authors place the changes in the Democratic Party in

the 1980s and 1990s into a wider context of growing neoliberal influence on the global

stage. Their work discusses Bill Clinton and how the party's new 'neoliberal orthodoxy'

seems to be the best way to unite it for the time being, and that focus is helpful for my

purposes. Since the two bring perspectives on public policy and contemporary politics

around the world, it seems apparent that they have the credentials to help my project.

Their inclusion of figures enhances their analysis, but some readers may find their

inclusion of minute tax details, among other data, hard to understand.

Self, Robert O. *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy since the 1960s*.
New York: Hill and Wang, a division of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013.

Robert O. Self is a Mary Ann Lippitt Professor of American History at Brown University.

His specialties include American Liberalism after World War II, gender, race, family, and

class. His work *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy since the*

1960s is a unique analysis of American politics in the latter half of the twentieth-century

from the perspective of the family unit. The focus on social movements and family

dynamics makes it helpful for my purposes because it complicates traditional narratives

of political history, which focus on parties and leaders. The work is readily accessible to

any interested reader, though the amount of his work concerning my topic is negligible,

confined to a chapter or two.

Stahl, Jason M. *Right Moves: the Conservative Think Tank in American Political Culture since 1945*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2016.

Jason Stahl, a senior lecturer in the Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy, and

Development at the University of Minnesota, discusses right-wing think tanks and other

groups in the Republican Party after 1945. His work, while not necessarily concerning

the DLC or the Democratic Party, addresses an important factor, that being the influence

of successful Republican think-tanks on the DLC's own approaches and frameworks. In

particular, the "Mandate of Change" is an idea the DLC directly borrowed from the

Heritage Foundation, and this is something Stahl, as well as others in the literature,

discuss, though none do it with the specific attention Stahl pays to the inter-party

connections. This source is helpful because it enhances my understanding of the other

side of the political spectrum from what I have been looking at. Through his discussion of

the DLC, Stahl gives a basis of understanding for why the Democrats felt a need to

transform their party in the 1980s.

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