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## 8

### Race, Gender, and the Clinton Presidency

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VIRGINIA SAPIRO AND DAVID T. CANON

*Thank you, my friends, for years of friendship.*

— President Bill Clinton speaking to the Congressional Black Caucus, 19 September 1998

As the old saying goes, "When you are down on your luck, you find out who your real friends are." In his tumultuous second term, President Clinton learned that among his best friends are African Americans and women. This support was first evident in his initial election to the presidency in 1992, when an overwhelming majority of blacks and a substantial plurality of women voted for Clinton over George Bush and Ross Perot,<sup>1</sup> and was maintained through the 1994, 1996, and 1998 elections. Some of the strongest images of this unshakable support among blacks and women occurred in 1998 during the turbulence surrounding the Lewinsky affair. Consider the dramatic night of the 1998 State of the Union message, when allegations of the Lewinsky affair had just exploded in Washington, leaving many congressional Democrats scrambling for cover and unwilling to offer their public support to the president. In stark contrast, many members of the Congressional Black Caucus, in their eagerness to show their support, arrived several hours before the speech so they could grab the seats on the aisle and shake the president's hand as he walked toward the podium.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, 1998 was punctuated with images of top-level women politicians and women's movement leaders

pointedly demonstrating their support for Clinton, despite constant and voluble charges of hypocrisy launched by conservatives and, indeed, critics across the political spectrum.

This enthusiastic support suggests the obvious questions: What was their motivation? What did they gain in return? These questions focus attention on the permeation of the Clinton presidency with gender and race politics. As we show, a portrait of the Clinton presidency that does not highlight racial and gender politics is incomplete, to say the least. But the task of this chapter is the more difficult one of identifying the gender and racial politics aspects of the *legacy* of the Clinton presidency, rather than simply describing how they influenced his tenure.

In the next section we argue that the Clinton presidency follows a period of substantial change in the nature of gender and racial politics in the United States, and that a Democratic president of his era and generation would have been unlikely to ignore the major implications of those changes. But did Clinton leave his own lasting mark on this era of politics? Will gender and racial politics in the United States, and especially the role of women and minorities in electoral, appointive, and policy politics be any different because of Clinton's presidency? Or was he merely caught in a tide that would have produced similar outcomes without him?

We attempt to answer these questions by examining the historical context of racial and gender politics, women and minorities' electoral and public support for Clinton, his appointments and inner circle, and his policy legacy and issue stands and actions. This thematic organization reveals the dynamics of the racial and gender politics of the Clinton administration and suggests their larger implications for American politics at the threshold of the new century. Before Clinton came to office, African Americans, Hispanics, and women had become potentially important building blocks of support for a Democratic president; he, in turn, focused substantial attention on the distinctive needs of these groups, and they, then, responded with their support.<sup>3</sup> These historically under represented groups have emerged from the political periphery to help shape the last presidency of the twentieth century. It is unlikely that any president in the future—certainly any Democratic one—will be able to ignore minorities and women.

### Setup for Success: The Historical Context of Racial and Gender Politics

For Americans born and raised in the last half of the twentieth century, it is not news to say that African Americans and women vote disproportionately Demo-

cratic. This was not always the case, and to understand current race and gender politics, one must understand the dynamic of race- and gender-based partisanship by examining the partisan change that occurred historically.

Law and discrimination severely limited African Americans' electoral participation until the 1960s. From the Civil War until the 1930s, they primarily supported the Republican Party, the "party of Lincoln," in opposition to the Democrats, the party of southern segregationists. In many black families, supporting a Democrat was considered political treason. As recently as 1932, three-fourths of blacks still voted for the Republican presidential candidate over the Democrat, FDR.<sup>4</sup> Blacks began to move to the Democratic Party during the Roosevelt administration, when New Deal programs gave unprecedented assistance to black as well as white people to pull them out of the depths of the Great Depression and began to address race discrimination.<sup>5</sup> Black support for the Democrats continued to build through the next several decades as the northern Democratic Party, and its leaders, such as Harry S Truman and John F. Kennedy, proved consistently more antisegregationist than the Republican (or the southern Democratic) Party. The final blow to black Republicanism came in the 1960s, when a Democratic president, Lyndon Johnson, and a Democratic Congress pushed through the crucial 1964 Civil Rights Act and 1965 Voting Rights Act over Republican opposition.<sup>6</sup>

The campaign strategies and presidencies of Richard Nixon (especially his "southern strategy" of attracting white voters through thinly veiled racial appeals) and Ronald Reagan reinforced the racial divide in partisan patterns of voting. Consequently, more than 90 percent of black voters supported Democratic presidential candidates, even in the losing campaigns of 1980, 1984, and 1988. (For race differences in voting patterns, see figure 8.1, p. 172.) Meanwhile, as racially exclusive policies faded, African Americans had not only become more Democratic, but also more politically active, prominent, and influential at all levels of politics, especially because of the substantial decrease in both legal and informal discrimination against African Americans in the political arena.

The gender basis of political affiliations and participation also underwent important shifts. Gender differences in partisanship were never as large as race differences; in fact, men and women, as groups, have usually voted similarly. But where differences appeared, for example, in the 1950s, women tended to be a bit more Republican than men. This began to change in the 1960s, especially as the parties diverged more markedly in their levels of defense hawkishness, their stands on social welfare, and their levels of support for civil rights and antidis-

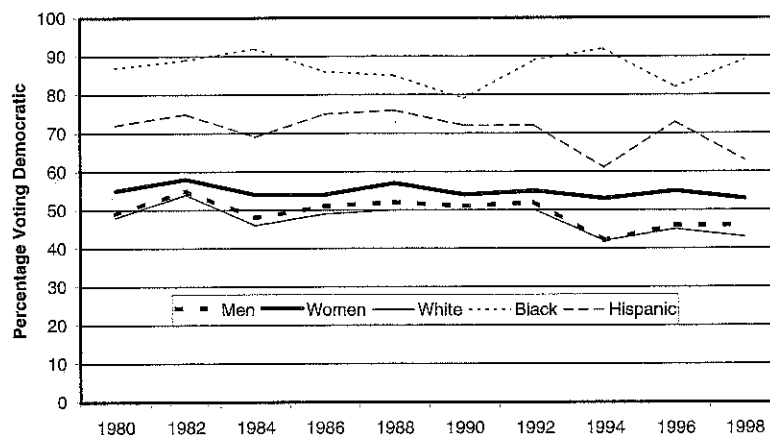


Figure 8.1. Democratic Vote in Congressional Races, by Race and Gender

crimination policies. The parties became divided on many policies relating to specifically to women and gender questions, from antidiscrimination policies to abortion to policies related to violence against women. Because of the disproportionate prevalence of poverty among women, social-welfare politics should be included among these gender-related issues; women's movement organizations have long defined poverty and social-welfare policy in general as especially relevant to women.

The actual policy and social changes were so great in the 1970s that they became a key focus of the conservative backlash that gained force within Ronald Reagan's campaign for the presidency in 1980. As a result of this combination of policies, the 1980 presidential and congressional elections produced the first noticeable "gender gap," in which men voted disproportionately Republican and women disproportionately Democratic. Although the *degree* of gender difference in the vote has varied in subsequent elections, there has been a strong tendency for men to vote more Republican than women. For gender differences in congressional voting, see figure 8.1.

Research shows that the emergence of gender differences in any given election depends on the specific context and the degree to which it happens to be laden with the kinds of cues that stimulate political gender differences.<sup>7</sup> These

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cues vary from election to election. Despite some moderation in Democratic stands—encouraged in large part by the Democratic Leadership Council, of which Bill Clinton was an early leading member—the parties have remained distinctly different on a combination of issues that encourages gender differentiation in the vote.<sup>8</sup>

Even though gender differences in the *vote* do not emerge in every election to an equal degree, since the late 1970s men's and women's basic *partisan allegiances* have become different.

By the beginning of the 1990s, an important fact of political life was that in the general erosion of the New Deal Democratic coalition at the mass level, young white men, white ethnic men, and southern men had left the Democratic Party in disproportionate numbers, while women and African Americans were more resistant to the anti-welfare state, anti-affirmative action, and conservative "family values" messages of the Republicans. Black and female voters, therefore, offered a needed well of support for the Democratic Party, but important differences between these two groups as collectivities have different implications for strategies necessary for drawing from that well. Let us look at them briefly, then see how Clinton acted on these implications.

Women comprise a majority of the population (especially among the elderly), are geographically evenly distributed across the nation, support Democratic candidates only somewhat more than Republicans (although the gender difference depends on the context), and, since 1980, have voted at rates that are higher than or equal to those of men. African Americans comprise 12 percent of the population, are concentrated in specific geographic regions (especially the South and urban areas), overwhelmingly support Democrats, but have relatively low voting rates (in recent elections, an average of 8 percentage points less than white voters).

Consequently, the incentive to appeal specifically to women voters or to minority groups depends on the specific political context and office, and the most appropriate strategy for doing so must be different. The key for Democrats in gender politics is to stimulate women's disproportionate support for them without simultaneously draining men's Democratic support. The key for the Democratic Party's race politics is to mobilize its base of support among black citizens and get them to the polls without, at the same time, alienating white voters whose security within the Democratic ranks may be more fragile. This is a difficult balancing act. A Democratic candidate can easily become caught between African-American leaders, who have complained for years that Democratic candidates

take their votes for granted (in some cases hinting at a willingness to use abstention as a weapon of rebuke), and Republican opponents, who have sometimes capitalized on white fears of the Democratic Party's courting of black votes, as the infamous "Willie Horton" commercial run by the 1988 Bush campaign demonstrated.

Thus, as Bill Clinton was formulating his campaign for the presidency, one key element that would affect his potential for success would be how his campaign played into the structure of gender and race politics. As it happened, Clinton was of just the right generation and position to understand and use these features of contemporary politics with respect to race and gender politics and was in a unique position, as he moved from the governor's mansion to the White House, to take advantage of them.

Much has been made of the fact that Clinton was the first U.S. president to be born in the post-World War II era, going through his formative years in the 1950s and 1960s, then crafting his political style in the 1970s and 1980s. This is especially important in his relationship to gender and race politics. From 1946, the year of Bill Clinton's birth, to the period when he launched his bid for the presidency, the United States was transformed from a race-segregated nation in which blacks could rarely participate in electoral politics to a country in which there was equal protection under the law and a much greater role for blacks in the electoral process. The exciting civil rights movement that took place in Clinton's youth evolved into a more mature policy area, but remained central both to American politics generally and to the development of Clinton's political identity.

In that same period, women's roles and affiliations in politics, as well as social and economic life, also changed substantially. In 1946 only 28 percent of women were in the workforce, only eleven women served in the House of Representatives, and none were in the Senate or the cabinet. In contrast, by 1992 a majority of women—even mothers of small children—were in the workforce. The proportion of women in public office had risen somewhat (although they held only 6 percent of the congressional seats and 18 percent of statewide elective offices). The women's movement had been reborn, and even if most women never labeled themselves "feminists," the majority of women persistently believed that increasing gender equality in the family, education, economic life, and politics was a desirable goal, and that there was need for a women's movement to help achieve it.<sup>9</sup>

Clinton's personal circumstances offered him strong links to the black community, he has spent his adult life surrounded by professional, politically active,

feminist women (including his wife), and he is a politician with an inclination always to have one eye on the public opinion polls and focus group results. Neither Clinton's success in 1992, nor the outcomes of the subsequent three elections, can be understood without examining the importance of women and minorities in the Democratic Party.

## Parties, Public Opinion, and Electoral Support

We now turn to the center of our argument: the relationship of race and gender to Clinton's electoral and public opinion coalition. We examine each election of the Clinton era in turn to track the gender and race politics of public support for the president and his response to those social groups.

### 1992: The First Election of Bill Clinton

Gender politics was highlighted early and vociferously in 1992. It was the widely declared "Year of the Woman,"<sup>10</sup> a term coined during the 1992 campaign, in reference primarily to congressional election campaigns. Women were encouraged to run in unprecedented numbers at all levels of government. This infusion of women candidates trumpeting their gender and bringing attention to "women's issues," combined with the predominant influence of the Christian Coalition on the Republican platform. Many of the events of the Republican convention focused on gender issues in the presidential race. Women increased their numbers in the House (from twenty-eight to forty-eight) and in the Senate (from two to six). The gains were due to the unprecedented number of female candidates rather than to a higher success rate among women in the 1992 elections.

The gender gap in the presidential vote was small (about 5 percentage points difference), partly because of the confounding effects of the Perot candidacy, which took a disproportionate number of young male votes from George Bush. But especially where women were on the ballot for major offices, thus "cueing up" gender in the campaigns, Bill Clinton benefited strongly from women's votes.<sup>11</sup> When the dust cleared, Bill Clinton and the Democrats had another lesson in the importance of paying attention to women's political organizations—especially feminist organizations. The PACs and related organizations contributed substantial amounts to political campaigns in 1992; indeed, EMILY's List bundled more money and shipped it off to campaigns than any other political

contributor in the nation, outstripping the traditional big guns such as doctors and realtors.<sup>12</sup>

In contrast to the attention received by women, more contradictory tendencies emerged with respect to racial minorities in 1992. On one hand, blacks increased their membership in the House from twenty-six to thirty-nine and Latinos from eleven to seventeen, because of the creation of fifteen new U.S. House districts that were specifically drawn to help elect African Americans and ten districts that were drawn to provide opportunities to elect new Latino members.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the 1992 congressional elections could have been characterized as the "Year of the Minority," but the presidential campaign was an entirely different matter. Running as a "New Democrat," Bill Clinton actively sought to distance himself from this traditional base of the Democratic Party while emphasizing that he was not beholden to the "special interests." He favored the death penalty, "ending welfare as we know it," and supporting people who "work hard and play by the rules," moves that could be seen as attempts to separate himself from the African-American community and win back some of the white voters who had been voting Republican.

In a defining campaign moment, Clinton used his address before Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition in June to attack Sister Souljah, a black rap star who, in speaking to the organization the day before, had said, "If black people kill black people every day, why not have a week and kill white people?"<sup>14</sup> The rebuke was also aimed at Jesse Jackson, who moments earlier had mentioned with some pride the presence of Sister Souljah at the Rainbow Coalition meeting. Until the "Sister Souljah speech," Clinton was running third behind President Bush and Ross Perot. Political columnist Clarence Page wrote that the Sister Souljah event was the "most important moment in the 1992 presidential race."<sup>15</sup>

Black leaders were angry, but Clinton knew that voting for Bush was a less attractive alternative for most blacks than voting for him. Charles Rangel, a prominent black House member from New York, remarked, "The damn strategy is working." He compared (with some prescience!) Clinton's treatment of black voters to a man who tells his mistress, "Meet me in the hotel room; I don't want to be seen with you in the lobby."<sup>16</sup>

However, Clinton's campaign strategy did not completely turn its back on the black community. He did, after all, make his Sister Souljah remarks at a Rainbow Coalition meeting, suggesting a second, perhaps simultaneous interpretation—an effort to attract *middle-class* black voters. (It is crucial to remember that although African Americans are overwhelmingly Democratic, they by no means

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constitute a politically homogeneous community.) Moreover, even while Clinton publicly distanced himself from Jesse Jackson, he was strengthening his base of support among moderate black leaders such as John Lewis (D-Ga.), Mike Espy (D-Miss.), and William Jefferson (D-La.) in the U.S. House, Baltimore mayor Kurt Schmoke, and Atlanta mayor Maynard Jackson. And, he continued to advocate a range of issue stands that found favor in the black community, as did his promise to make government more representative.

The strategy was a resounding success. In the primary elections Clinton received 70 percent of the black vote;<sup>17</sup> roughly 20 percent of Clinton's votes in the primary came from black voters. In the general election, Clinton received 89 percent of the black two-party vote (82 percent overall) and Hispanics gave Clinton 71 percent of the two-party vote (62 percent overall).<sup>18</sup>

While black voters helped deliver the presidency to Clinton, some evidence supports the "strategic abstention" argument outlined earlier. While black turnout was marginally higher in 1992 than in 1988 (up 2.5 percent), black voters declined as a proportion of the electorate (from 10.5 percent in 1988 to 8 percent in 1992) because white turnout was up 4.5 percent in 1992.<sup>19</sup> Without Jesse Jackson running in the primaries, black registration dropped a bit in 1992,<sup>20</sup> and Clinton's strategic distancing probably alienated some black voters who stayed home on election day.

### **The 1994 Midterms: The Republican Landslide—among White Men**

Unlike presidential elections, no single campaign brings parties together or focuses voters' attention during midterm elections. The 1994 elections, however, were different: the midterm backlash against the president's party, encouraged by a national campaign, was so strong that the Democrats lost both houses of Congress for the first time in forty years. In the previous congressional election year, 1990, people had voted for Democratic over Republican candidates by a 52–48 margin; in 1994 they voted for Republicans over Democrats by a 53–47 margin.<sup>21</sup> The backlash occurred primarily among white men and, to a lesser degree, among Hispanic men and women.<sup>22</sup>

The 1994 midterms were noteworthy for two reasons. First, a gender gap, in some races impressively large, again emerged across the country. Second, blacks supported Democrats at their typically high levels, but relatively low black turnout hurt Democratic candidates nationwide.

As the *Chicago Tribune* reported, "If women voters had prevailed in the midterm elections, the Senate would have remained in Democratic hands and several governors' seats would have gone to Democrats instead of Republicans."<sup>23</sup> But how can we account for the gendered nature of the electoral response? The "angry white male" was the main rhetorical device that journalists and pundits seized upon as the apparent inverse of the 1992 "Year of the Woman." The angry white male was said to feel left out and left behind, especially by the president's emphasis on such issues as gays in the military; affirmative action, which might help blacks and women; the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which was widely seen as hurting the bulk of traditional blue-collar working men; his large number of controversial appointments, especially of women and minorities; his failure on the health care plan, spearheaded by the dreaded Hillary Rodham Clinton; and his inability to follow through on promises to cut taxes and "end welfare as we know it."

If many white men saw these policies and felt left out, presumably women, minorities, and the other named vulnerable groups saw the same policies and felt, at least to some degree, that the administration had kept them in mind. That is certainly what their votes suggest. But, although strong black turnout was pivotal in helping Democrats win a few key races, such as Chuck Robb's victory over Oliver North in the most hotly contested Senate race of the year, relatively low turnout limited black voters' influence overall.

#### 1996: Clinton's Reelection

The 1996 presidential election was similar to the 1992 election in many ways. Clinton's themes did not change dramatically. He intensified efforts to court women's votes in particular, partly through the White House Office for Women's Initiatives and Outreach, established in June 1995. This office, designed to "amplify the president's pro-woman, pro-family agenda," held roundtables called "At the Table" events, reflecting the idiom long used to indicate inclusion and exclusion from the centers of power.<sup>24</sup>

The potential power of the women's vote emerged early in the 1996 electoral season. First, the game of budgetary chicken Congress and the president played late in 1995 magnified the gender gap. In a poll taken at the beginning of January 1996, 38 percent of men and 50 percent of women blamed the Republicans in Congress for the recent government shutdown.<sup>25</sup> A gender difference emerged in the presidential horse-race polls, and before long women's support for Bill Clinton

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over Bob Dole became so large—as much as 30 percentage points difference among women—that Republican strategists were calling the phenomenon a gender *canyon* rather than a gender gap.<sup>26</sup>

From early summer on, the Dole forces looked increasingly desperate in their attempts to gain some female support. The Republican convention highlighted women speakers; Dole's campaign strategists attempted to moderate the harsh tones the party had been taking, especially with respect to abortion, and to emphasize any support for safety-net policies they had. Nevertheless, Republican campaign experts knew they had a fundamental problem: their base of support was primarily male, and their appeal was weak among women on both policy and tone grounds. As Linda DiVall, a key Republican pollster, said as the Republican convention began,

One clear explanation for it is that women tend to see a greater role for more activist government than men do. . . . Men are mad at the taxes they pay; they want government out of their lives. Women are not necessarily looking for big government and more intrusive government, but they do appreciate certain things that government does well, . . . so one of the goals of this Republican convention . . . is to . . . change the face and the perception of the Republican Party.

She added, "You're going to see, *I want to say, a new Republican Party, but that's not the case at all*, but you'll see Republicans showcased who demonstrate the values [discussed above], have a sense of enthusiasm and compassion . . ." (emphasis added).<sup>27</sup> This was one of the first indications that the Republican Party was going to make moves toward repairing its relationship with women.

The effort did not work, as polls and the final vote showed. Even during the Republican convention, 55 percent of people polled by CBS thought that Democrats would do better at dealing with "the needs and problems of women," compared with 24 percent who thought the Republicans would do better; 42 percent thought the Republicans would do better at dealing with "the needs and problems of men" compared with 33 percent who thought this of Democrats.<sup>28</sup>

Meanwhile, the Clinton campaign carefully and consciously built part of its electoral strategy on its potential strength among women. Clinton campaigners rarely failed to mention that Dole's party was Newt Gingrich's party, a leader who had 19 percentage points more unfavorable than favorable ratings among men, but 38 percentage points more unfavorable than favorable ratings among women. Clinton operatives found that the key to women's support was a series of policies such as support for workplace and education equality policies, increasing the minimum wage and Earned Income Tax Credit, parental leave, enforcing

child support, protection against violence against women and children, increasing funds for women's health care (especially breast cancer research), and other policies offering specific help to women.<sup>29</sup>

Both the Clinton campaign and some Republican strategists understood that the key to women's support was their disproportionate presence among the poor and the elderly, among those who had the direct, day-to-day responsibility for caring for their dependent children and elderly parents, among those who needed help balancing the demands of caring for their families and supporting them financially, and among those who were employed by the public sector. The current leadership of the congressional Republicans scared them, and they were less likely than men to believe that the country would be better off if the government could be trimmed by cutting the economic safety net for those most at risk. Ironically, for many women's movement leaders, as for black leaders, Clinton's chief policy liability was that he had signed the welfare reform bill, which promised to "end welfare as we know it"—a move that protected his right flank.

The strategy of emphasizing women's issues paid off. Bill Clinton did not win the 1996 election among men; he won it among women. More specifically, he won a landslide victory among unmarried women (62–28 percent), he had a strong lead among unmarried men (49–35 percent), won among married women (48–43 percent), and lost among married men (40–48 percent).<sup>30</sup>

The racial politics of the 1996 campaign mirrored the gender politics much more closely than the more arms-length approach of 1992. Clinton was aware of the need to mobilize black voters, but he also knew that the dynamic of "structural dependence" was still working in his favor (that is, blacks were unlikely to vote for the less attractive Republican alternative). Nevertheless, Clinton knew that many black leaders were outraged that he had signed the welfare reform legislation and that he would have to mend some fences with black voters. He repeatedly pointed out that he had vetoed two earlier, and more punitive, versions of the bill; he also promised to fix some of the more extreme aspects of the bill, such as the provision that would have denied assistance to legal immigrants. These efforts moderated some criticism of him.

Welfare reform gave Clinton more leeway with white male voters. So did the very strong economy, and the end to the budget deficit, a feat for which he was happy to take credit. Having established his credibility as a New (i.e., moderate) Democrat, he could turn to the difficult task of solidifying his base. This type of balancing act is the stuff of coalition politics, and Bill Clinton was a master at keeping people happy. Clinton used three issues to reach out to black voters:

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speaking out against the burning of black churches in the South, affirmative action, and the ban on assault weapons.

In the year preceding the election, more than 100 black churches in the South were burned. While some critics pointed out that most of these fires were not racially motivated, the rash of fires reawakened the searing images of the KKK fire-bombing black churches during the civil rights movement, providing fertile ground for symbolic race politics. Bob Dole was one of the first in Congress to advocate a concerted national effort to find and punish those responsible, and Clinton convened a White House meeting of southern governors, promised aggressive action from the Justice Department, and spent his fiftieth birthday helping to rebuild a burnt Tennessee church. He frequently expressed his outrage against the church burnings when campaigning across the country.

Speaking out against church burnings is a relatively easy position to take politically, and one with potent symbolic appeal, but Clinton also staked out potentially more divisive positions on racial issues. Affirmative action is one of the clear "wedge issues" that divides black and white voters. Depending on the wording of the specific poll, about two-thirds of blacks favor affirmative action, compared with less than a quarter of whites. Clinton supported affirmative action, preferring to "mend it, not end it," while Dole opposed what he called "quotas and preferential treatment," the label he always attached to affirmative action. Beyond the differences between the candidates and their parties on race issues, Dole never seemed comfortable discussing the question of race, while Clinton seemed to treat it almost as home turf, sometimes sounding like a participant in a diversity training workshop.<sup>31</sup>

The ban on assault weapons was another issue that was strongly favored by blacks (and women) and by Clinton and opposed by Dole. African Americans are disproportionately victimized by crime, especially gang-based use of assault weapons. Clinton chose an address to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to state his commitment to veto any attempt to override the gun ban. Dole, invited to speak on the same subject, declined to attend, claiming a scheduling conflict. Ultimately, he accused NAACP head Kweisi Mfume of trying to "set me up" and confessed a preference for audiences he can "relate to."<sup>32</sup> Black leaders were outraged; the editorial commentary was scathing:

One wonders what Dole was expecting from an NAACP audience—a fusillade of rotting tomatoes? Sure, they might have been cool, even skeptical. But they would have listened, given him a chance to make the case that the big,

Republican tent is the place for blacks to be. Instead, he spurned them, and that forces a question: Do you really want us under your tent, Bob? I mean, c'mon. This is courtship? If I'd gone courting like the GOP, I'd still be a bachelor.<sup>33</sup>

Dole tried to compensate for the blunder. In a meeting with the National Association of Black Journalists, Dole apologized for "not knowing" about the NAACP convention. "I deeply believe that the Republican Party will never be whole until it earns the broad support of African Americans and others by speaking to their hopes," he said.<sup>34</sup> By then it was too little, too late; 84 percent of blacks voted for Clinton and only 12 percent for Dole. Hispanics went for Clinton by a 72–21 percent margin.

Clinton explicitly appealed to black voters to turn out to vote. Black churches cooperated in crucial ways in this effort. Henry J. Lyons, the president of the association of black Baptist churches, appeared with Clinton at the black Baptist convention, saying, "Two years ago, we let something happen that never should have happened. We had the numbers on the books, but we did not go to the polls. We cannot let it happen again."<sup>35</sup> Other black ministers concurred and joined in.<sup>36</sup> Black voters responded to the call and helped deliver a second term to President Clinton, composing 10 percent of the electorate.

### **The 1998 Midterm Surprise and Scandal**

Women's support for the president remained relatively high, compared with that from men, and blacks' support for Clinton was unshakable throughout the second term. The greatest test came through the long, grinding months of the increasingly explicit revelations of the Clinton/Lewinsky scandal throughout 1998. Much of the press and most pundits expected Clinton's support to weaken disproportionately among women, especially among feminists, who had long made sexual harassment a key issue. They were wrong, and many continued to be baffled as the evidence poured in showing that women and men at the mass level tended to react roughly the same way, but where there were differences, men were harsher in their judgment of Clinton and reacted more negatively in their support scores than women did.

For example, in a Gallup survey conducted in the middle of August 1998, when President Clinton had already made his speech to the public admitting to his "inappropriate relationship" with Lewinsky and was about to testify to the grand jury about his relationship with Lewinsky, 59 percent of men and 63 per-

cent of women approved of the job Clinton was doing as president. A CBS poll taken at about the same time put black approval at 94 percent. Roughly the same proportion of men (68 percent) and women (70 percent) thought that whatever Clinton and Lewinsky had done was a private, not a public, matter. Men, but especially women, were less supportive of the president in his private behavior—52 percent of men and 45 percent of women respected Clinton as a person.

Why did women seem, if anything, less harsh on Clinton as *president* than men were? Many reasons were offered, but they seem to boil down to three things. First, the public and interest group leaders alike responded to the scandal in a partisan manner, and women are more Democratic than men, thus more supportive of a Democratic president. Second, and closely related, gender differences in issue priorities—women's coinciding more with the Clinton agenda—bolstered women's views of Clinton as *president*, if not as a person. Third, polls showed that even though the public did not like Clinton's actions, they believed the process that *revealed* his actions and judged them was highly partisan and its investigations excessive. Congress seemed to be paying attention to little else (the budget bill, for example, was delayed until it was pushed through in a harried rush at the very last moment), and the public became about as negative toward the Republican Congress with respect to how it was doing its job, as it was with regard to Clinton, the man. The lack of support for Congress was especially great among women.<sup>37</sup>

Black support for Clinton was evident for many of the same reasons, especially partisanship and suspicion about the motivations of the Republican Congress and Kenneth Starr. A September 1998 CBS poll asked, "Whom do you blame more for the current scandal situation, Clinton or his political enemies?" Blacks were more likely to blame his enemies (55–27 percent), while white were more likely to place blame on Clinton (59–32 percent).<sup>38</sup> Many black leaders and commentators have speculated that blacks are more likely to support Clinton than whites because of the shared sense among blacks of what it means to be singled out for harsh treatment. As Rep. Charles Rangel (D-N.Y.) said, "The more they beat up on him, the stronger his support will be among the African-American community. African Americans know what persecution is."<sup>39</sup> Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.) explained that his constituents did not want to see Clinton resign or have him impeached: "They just want us to leave him alone because there's this deep feeling in the black community that this president has been there for us."<sup>40</sup>

Turnout among blacks and women and the gender and racial gaps in the 1998 midterm elections helped deliver historic results for the Democrats. For only the second time since the Civil War, the president's party actually gained

ground in the House (picking up five seats) and held even in the Senate. Although the gender gap was not quite as great as it had been in 1994 (11 points in 1994 versus 6 points in 1998; see figure 8.1, p. 172), it was still there and made the crucial difference in high-profile races, such as those in New York and North Carolina where Republicans lost key seats, and in California, where an extremely vulnerable Democrat kept hers.

The front-page headline in the *New York Times* following the stunning 1998 results said, "Democrats in Political Debt for Black Turnout in South."<sup>41</sup> Black voters supported Democratic congressional candidates at their typical 89–11 percent rate, and they comprised 10 percent of the electorate. In some key states, such as South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama, black turnout was extremely high. Clinton and the Democratic Party actively wooed black voters with massive direct-mail efforts, an appearance by Clinton on BET, and many visits to black churches by Clinton. The Georgia Democratic Party exploited the Republicans' effort to bring up the Lewinsky scandal in a \$30 million ad campaign (which was widely viewed as an ill-advised move) with a mailing sent to black voters with a picture of Newt Gingrich and Kenneth Starr saying, "They couldn't win at the ballot box, so now they want to overturn your choice. Send them a message."<sup>42</sup> And they did.

David Gergen summarized the 1998 midterm:

Along both coasts, the key swing voters have become women, blacks, and one of the fastest-growing minorities in the country, Hispanics. National Democrats understand their political power and have effectively appealed to them, while national Republicans have not. Too many women and minorities now see the GOP as a haven for macho white males.<sup>43</sup>

Especially in 1998, traditional Democratic constituent groups such as the unions were crucial. But it was also important that the Clinton campaigns and administration successfully worked to exploit (and even institutionalize) the race and gender divergence in partisanship and party support that had begun long before the Clinton years. Much as the Republican Party had successfully detected and then built recruitment and mobilization strategies around issue- and demographic-based trends in the South or among some white ethnics in recent decades, Clinton's forces did so with respect to women and minorities. The policy agenda he promoted, the policy directions, and, perhaps more important, the symbolic politics embedded in his appointments, and the manner in which he dealt with progressive women's interest groups and civil rights and with black interest



groups each flowed from and contributed to continued institutionalization of women and minorities as a necessary pieces of a successful Democratic strategy.

### **Movement and Interest Group Leaders**

The leaders of women's and minorities' groups played crucial roles in influencing Clinton's presidency and, most likely, his legacy. We argue that a two-step process of communication occurred that has been familiar to students of public opinion at least since V.O. Key's classic writings on the subject. This classic formulation of "opinion leaders" who help shape the opinions of the less attentive public describes, at least in part, the relationship between Clinton and women's and minorities' interest groups and leaders. Clinton's message often was directed at group leaders who would respond favorably and then convey their support for Clinton to their members. Many of the moves he made that were aimed at gaining women's and African Americans' support went undetected by much of the mass public, and he and his aides must have known it. (Who knew, for example, what a large new program in breast-cancer research, detection, and intervention the administration launched? How many people were aware of the administration's ultimate support for an African woman seeking asylum in the United States for fear of having to face genital mutilation if she returned to Togo?) But these efforts would certainly attract the attention not just of interest group and social movement leaders per se but of opinion leaders in the black community and among women who, in turn, provided a bulwark of strong support at critical moments. (Both interest group leaders and important segments of the opinion leading attentive public would have been aware of both of the stories just cited.)

Thus, we hypothesize, this two-step process had both direct and indirect effects on Clinton's presidency. Direct effects are rooted in specific support actions taken by various groups, such as the financial support provided by women's PACs, or the get-out-the-vote efforts sponsored by black groups, or the public displays of support offered to the president by interest group leaders and leading black and female politicians. Indirect effects refer to the ability of group leaders to drum up support for Clinton among their members, and to the tendency for opinion leaders, more generally, to influence a wider segment of members of their community or social group. We have seen evidence of these direct effects in the results of polls and elections, discussed earlier.

Evidence of the indirect effects is more difficult to detect, and some would argue that the connections between the leaders and the larger mass public are ten-

uous. Indeed, some critics argue that the leadership of women's and minorities' groups is "out of step" with their constituents. Feminist group leaders tend to be much more homogeneously Democratic, liberal, pro-choice, and pro-gay rights than women in the mass public are. Black members of Congress differ in key respects, for example, on school choice, abortion, and gay rights, from African Americans in general. Nevertheless, while groups such as the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights and the NAACP are generally more liberal than their members, there are few differences between them and the rank and file on issues that comprise their core agenda: affirmative action, opposition to discrimination, policies to aid the inner city, and government support for education and economic development. Likewise, women seem to have responded well to the agenda that women's group leaders have urged on the Democratic Party in general, and Clinton in particular. It is symbolically important that women leaders—not just avowedly *feminist* leaders, but a large number of women leaders from many walks of life—have expressed support for the policies that Clinton has supported, with the possible exception of the welfare reform law.

Group leaders have also influenced Clinton's success and his legacy through congressional leaders. In the Democratic Party, members of Congress have always been important leaders of the women's movement and black groups. Bella Abzug, Barbara Jordan, Patricia Schroeder, Adam Clayton Powell, Ron Dellums, John Lewis, and Charles Rangel are among the most visible women and black leaders of the past generation. Female and black members of Congress were among the most supportive of Clinton's policies.

In contrast, not only Republican strategists such as Linda DiVall, but even some members of the Republican congressional delegation have argued that the Republican Party has an image problem that cedes too much minority and female support. In the 1998 postelection leadership shuffle, when Jennifer Dunn announced her unsuccessful challenge to Dick Armey for the majority leadership of the House, she said, "We must broaden the base of the party by crafting a message that reaches out to everybody from every background." This represents an explicit strategy by Dunn to "focus energy on helping the Republicans improve their standing among female voters."<sup>44</sup> In that same shuffle, the only black Republican in the House, Rep. J.C. Watts Jr. (Okla.), won the position of chair of the House Republican Conference, a move that was widely seen as an additional attempt to broaden the Republican base.

African-American and women's group leaders, then, were highly visible components of the coalition of support Clinton pieced together out of the politi-

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cal fabric that was being woven together by the two parties throughout his career, and certainly before he became president. Thus, late in 1998, many observers who perhaps had not been paying close attention were shocked to see black, women, and gay interest group and movement leaders being demonstrative about their opposition to what they considered partisan campaigns against the president and their opposition to impeachment. In a joint press release issued in late September 1998, fourteen leaders or former leaders of major women's organizations charged that the process of developing and issuing the Starr Report was partisan and "a failure of fairness and has violated the fundamental value of due process," part of a "relentless campaign . . . to hound President Clinton out of office." It is symbolically important that the parties to this press release were not just associated with umbrella feminist groups such as the National Organization for Women, the Feminist Majority, the National Women's Political Caucus, and the National Council of Women's Organizations. In an obvious strategy to press the point about the "rainbow" of opposition to the moves against Clinton, the list included leaders of the National Council of Negro Women, the United Farm Workers, Black Women United for Action, the Black Leadership Forum, and the National Asian Pacific Legal Consortium.<sup>45</sup>

The bottom line for these leaders had to do with recognition of progress in policy and representation, as they saw it, and the possibility of backsliding if the less sympathetic Republican congressional majority was to have its way with policy. To understand the strength of these views, it is necessary to look at the tangible signs these opinion leaders assessed in their perception of Bill Clinton and his opposition in relation to their own interests: appointments and public policy.

### Appointments and the Inner Circle

Candidate Clinton promised a government that "looks like America." By this, of course, he meant no complicated theories of representation; rather, he was promising social groups that heretofore felt underrepresented in a *descriptive representation* sense—that is, not enough people "looked like them"—that the face of government would literally change. Historically, no major social group was as unrepresented in this sense as women, who have always constituted a majority of the citizenry but only a handful of those in government outside of clerical and nonmanagerial positions. But African Americans and other racial minorities were also dramatically underrepresented in government when Clinton took office. In

the end, his cabinet, subcabinet, and judicial appointments achieved the greatest gender and racial balance of any in U.S. history.

Judicial appointments are important objects of attention for any underrepresented group seeking increased presence. The courts have arguably played a more central role in advancing the agenda of progressive women's interest groups over the past three decades than have legislatures, and they have certainly been crucial for racial minorities. Thus, these interest groups eagerly anticipated a Democrat in office who might increase the proportion of women and minorities in judgeships. Clinton did make a difference, and quickly. Less than 2 percent of the U.S. District Court appointments made by LBJ, Nixon, and Ford were women; 14 percent of Carter's appointments, and 9 percent and 7 percent, respectively, of Reagan's first- and second-term District Court appointments were women. George Bush expanded that number significantly, to 20 percent, and in Clinton's first term he raised the figure again to 31 percent (62 of 202 positions).<sup>46</sup> Twenty-eight percent of his appointments to the federal bench were minorities.<sup>47</sup>

Even more noticed, of course, was the 1993 Supreme Court appointment of Ruth Bader Ginsburg, a former Columbia University law professor whom President Carter had successfully nominated to the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit in 1980. Ginsburg was well known in the feminist movement; she was one of the most prominent of the early law professors who published scholarly books and articles on women's rights and contemporary legal issues such as the Equal Rights Amendment. Despite her explicit feminism, however, Ginsburg's confirmation sailed through the Senate.

Clinton also changed the gender and racial composition of executive appointments substantially. Some of his appointments were extremely controversial and notable for the ways in which they raised conflicts over gender-related policies and what some people call "political correctness." Even before he took office, conservative critics accused him of using gender and race as criteria for appointments, while some feminist leaders expressed frustration at what they saw as slower progress in appointing women than they had hoped. Clinton lashed back in public against the "bean counters," who, in effect, wanted him to use quotas. Patricia Ireland, president of NOW, compared his reaction to the Sister Souljah incident: "I don't know whether this was designed to lower expectations or to separate himself somehow from being pushed around by women. The fact is it just makes us that much more determined that we will have to keep the pressure on."<sup>48</sup>

By the middle of his second term, President Clinton had successfully nominated five women and ten minorities to cabinet positions, including nontraditional positions, such as secretary of state and attorney general, and had appointed unprecedented numbers of women at "cabinet level" and on the White House staff. In the autumn of 1998, the White House reported that 41 percent of presidential appointees were women, including 29 percent of the positions requiring Senate confirmation.<sup>49</sup> Fourteen percent of Clinton's first-year presidential appointments were African American (compared with 12 percent of the population), 6 percent were Hispanic (compared with 9.5 percent of the population), and the percentages of Asian Americans and Native Americans appointed were identical to their proportion in the population.<sup>50</sup> Clinton also appointed the first (self-acknowledged) lesbian and gay people to senior-level positions in the administration. Just before the 1998 midterm elections, the Republican Senate rejected Clinton's nomination of an openly gay man as U.S. envoy to Luxembourg. Clinton's administration certainly looked more "like us" than any other had previously.

A small but notable number of these appointments stirred up controversies relating specifically to women's roles, gender, sexuality, and racial politics. The saga of choosing an attorney general is one of the signal cases; in Clinton's attempt to make the cabinet "look like America," one woman after another appeared in the parade of potential and actual nominees for the office, until the press and critics commented that it seemed that the main qualification for this office was being a woman.<sup>51</sup> Ironically, after two nominees failed because of controversies over the conditions under which they had hired domestic help (Zöe Baird and Kimba Wood), Clinton found a single, childless woman (Janet Reno), who would not fall victim to a "Nannygate" issue.

Clinton's nomination of Lani Guinier, an African-American civil rights lawyer and law professor, for the position of assistant attorney general for civil rights also became emblematic to Clinton's critics of his determination to make "politically correct" appointments governed by his close relationship with "special interest groups." There were not any illegal aliens in her past, but Guinier's academic writings proved to be her undoing. In various law review articles Guinier had expressed doubts about the ability of our political system to represent the interests of blacks. Instead she called for a system of "proportionate interest representation" that would involve procedures such as veto power over certain legislation for minorities and different electoral institutions, such as cumulative voting.<sup>52</sup> When a firestorm of protest erupted, Clinton hesitated, but then

withdrew her nomination, saying that he was not familiar with some of her more controversial ideas when he made the nomination. This displeased civil rights activists who argued that her ideas were misrepresented and that at the very least, she should have been granted a hearing. Some critics attributed Guinier's problems to her race and gender rather than to her controversial ideas. As occurred a number of times, Clinton's attempts to balance his commitments to both representation of women and minorities and the political moderation necessary for protecting the Democratic base caught him in a political windshear.

It happened again in the story of the rise and fall of Dr. Joycelyn Elders as surgeon general. Elders, the African-American former head of the Arkansas Department of Health, was well known for her bluntness and firmness in support of sex education and abortion. Clinton himself symbolically linked her to the history of race relations and politically inflammatory women; he was reported to have said of her, "Now I know how Abraham Lincoln felt when he met Harriet Beecher Stowe. He said, 'This is the little lady who started the great war.'"<sup>53</sup> Elders was a thorn in the side of conservative, fundamentalist, and Catholic groups—quite an accomplishment for a rather low-level appointee. Clinton was finally forced to ask for her resignation in the political conflagration that followed Elder's response to a question about her views on masturbation: "I think that is something that is a part of human sexuality and it's a part of something that perhaps should be taught. But we've not even taught our children the very basics. And I feel that we have tried ignorance for a very long time and it's time we try education."<sup>54</sup>

Racial politics also figured prominently in other Clinton appointments. His choice of a chief for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) was delayed for more than a year while Clinton searched for a Latino to fill the spot. Critics pointed out that the result—leaving a Reagan/Bush administration holdover to run this important department—may have been too high a price to pay for diversity. One article asked, "Is the symbolism of naming a Latino to the job more important than the impact of leaving leaderless the agency charged with enforcing laws prohibiting hiring discrimination on the basis of race, sex, age, or physical disability?"<sup>55</sup>

Bill Lann Lee's appointment to the position that initially would have been Guinier's was also controversial. Many people saw the nomination of the first Asian American appointed to this important civil rights post as overdue recognition of the increasingly multiracial composition of the United States, although some traditional black organizations, such as the NAACP, saw it as a possibly un-

fortunate movement away from recognizing the black-white divide as the central racial cleavage in American society. Many of these same issues would be revisited in the debates over Clinton's "Race Initiative," which we discuss later.

By far the most important and continually controversial relevant personnel issue, however, was the White House role of Hillary Rodham Clinton. Much has been written about the changing roles of the "first lady" in modern American history, and certainly a lot on Clinton herself.<sup>56</sup> Not since Eleanor Roosevelt had there been such heated argument over a first lady; like Hillary Clinton, Eleanor Roosevelt was both despised and revered (by different groups of people, of course) for both personal and political reasons, some relating specifically to her gender and race and to the gender and race politics of the presidency.<sup>57</sup>

Hillary Clinton became a center of attention during the first campaign, as her political-activist and feminist credentials became a source of appeal on the left and of ridicule and attack on the right. Not just her views and political and professional background, but her name and her hairstyle became newsworthy. In the transition period it became clear that the president's wife would be given unprecedented roles in the new White House. She was included in the inner circle of advisers and quietly given the supervisory role on domestic policy, excluding economic policy, but including especially the Department of Health and Human Services (to be headed by her colleague from the Children's Defense Fund, Donna Shalala) and related issues, and she oversaw the ill-fated appointment process for attorney general. Internal debates ensued over whether she should have a formal title (she did not), but for the first time in history, the first lady gained an office in the powerful West Wing of the White House.<sup>58</sup>

The saga of Hillary Rodham Clinton in the Clinton presidency is far too long to list even the main events. But the choice of the first lady to run the health care policy development process in the first term, the manner in which that process was organized (or not, as was perhaps closer to the case), her own suspect business dealings, her particular emphasis on women's issues, President Clinton's constant use of her at home and abroad as the chief administration spokeswoman on "women's issues," the unabashed admiration of the feminist community for her, and ultimately, her defense of the president during the events leading up to his impeachment made her an easy target for Clinton's detractors. She became one symbol of the Clinton administration that served as a focus of attention for the various controversies that swirled around the White House, but amazingly, in the midst of the Lewinsky scandal, she emerged as one of the most effective Democratic campaigners in the 1998 congressional elections.<sup>59</sup> She also served as a catalyst for debates of perhaps more lasting import.

But beyond the clearly partisan, political reactions, the powers and centrality of Hillary Rodham Clinton (and Clinton's close friend, Vernon Jordan, who had no official title after the transition was over but who worked closely with him) underscored a continuing debate in the modern presidency: What should be the shape and composition of the president's *real* inner circle, given the size and complexity of government machinery. Certainly most presidents in memory have had some close associates who were not elected or formally appointed government officials but who, by dint of the president's personal trust in them, actually held considerable power. And certainly other presidents had included family members and good friends in formal positions. But Hillary Clinton was clearly brought more formally into the process of governing and policymaking than any president's wife had been before. The only close family member of any sort with more power—Attorney General Robert Kennedy—at least had to go through a Senate confirmation process. In an age when husbands and wives, at least in the professional classes, are increasingly likely to share professional interests, this is not likely to be the last administration in which the spouse's role becomes an issue.

The overall social and political complexion of Clinton's appointments, and the specific controversies that erupted over them, sent very strong messages about his administration's goals but also embroiled him in controversies that had wider implications for the way the government is staffed. From the point of view of women's groups, feminists, and racial minorities, Clinton was effecting historic changes in the presence of underrepresented groups in the top ranks of government. As *both* liberal and conservative groups saw it, Clinton was not just increasing the numbers of women and minorities, but doing so in a manner that specifically enhanced a liberal, feminist, and race-conscious agenda. For women, minorities, and those on the left, these appointments seemed almost literally to provide a long-sought seat at the table; for the right, they represented the worst of "political correctness" and the politicization of administration. Above all, these controversies underscore the difficult political balancing act that must be performed by a Democratic leader of this era.

### Values, Issues, and Policies: Symbolic and Tangible Representational Links

While there are many parallels between the support women and minorities give the president, the diversity of presidential appointments, and the two-step communication flow between women's and minorities' interest groups and their rank and file, an interesting disjuncture occurs when it comes to policy concerns. The



connection that many blacks feel with President Clinton is deeply personal, while his policy record on racial issues is somewhat mixed. On the other hand, Clinton's personal behavior contradicts principles for which women's groups have been fighting for a generation, but his policy advocacy and record are generally consistent with agendas laid out by feminist organizations with two major exceptions: his signature on the welfare reform bill (1994) and on the "Defense of Marriage Act" (1996), which defines marriage as a "legal union between one man and one woman as husband and wife." (Many feminist and women's movement organizations are in alliance with the gay movement and organizations on most policy issues.)

The personal connection that many African Americans feel with President Clinton is clearly rooted in symbolic politics. Toni Morrison, the Nobel Prize-winning author, developed this point in her well-publicized comment that, "White skin notwithstanding, this is our first black president. Blacker than any actual black person who could ever be elected in our children's lifetime. After all, Clinton displays almost every trope of blackness: single-parent household, born poor, working-class, saxophone playing, McDonald's-and-junk-food-loving boy from Arkansas."<sup>60</sup>

While critics from the left and right howled in protest,<sup>61</sup> Clinton has undoubtedly connected with African Americans as no other president had. In addition to the life-connections noted by Morrison and others, many symbolic gestures and policy stands attracted black leaders to his side beyond the mere fact that, as a Democrat, he was likely to be more on their side of issues than the partisan alternatives. Clinton (and his wife, with him and separately) made trips to Africa, and there he made a point of apologizing for slavery, just as he had apologized to the victims of the Tuskegee syphilis experiment. (These apologies were met with derision from conservatives.) He drew attention to racial issues through the "national conversation on race," made record numbers of minority appointments, and firmly supported affirmative action despite how politically vulnerable that stand made him. From the White House website to numerous speeches, especially during the 1998 campaigns, Clinton repeatedly emphasized his support for policies such as the expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit, which benefits the working poor; raising the minimum wage; increasing funding for civil rights enforcement and programs to help the disadvantaged in health and education; and the often dramatic improvement in employment and education of African Americans. (Of course, the strong economy helped him here as it did in other ways.) No doubt, most black leaders are aware of the full litany, although they

are also aware of the welfare reform bill, the dumping of Lani Guinier, and other similar events.

In the end, however, as pointed as Clinton would like to claim many of these policies were, he probably drew the best connection through the symbolic politics of many of his issue stands, his relationships in the black community, and the diversity of his appointments. But to say that much of his impact was likely in "symbolic politics" is not to say his legacy will be minor. The partisan alternative, witnessed during the Bush and Reagan years, was to dismiss most of the issue stands on African-American organizations' agendas as "special interest pleading" by those who refuse to take care of themselves independently, as overreliance on a bloated public sector, or as demands for special privileges. In contrast, Clinton's use of the "bully pulpit" of the presidency, especially through such efforts as the Race Initiative, keeps these questions on the table for discussion. Nor was the Race Initiative merely symbolic politics; the breadth of the panel's undertaking was impressive. About 590 colleges and universities participated in the "Campus Week of Dialogue," 40 states participated in "Statewide Days of Dialogue," more than 18,000 people in 113 cities participated in more than 1,400 "One America Conversations," the advisory board met with 291 different organizations and 62 American Indian Tribal Governments, and the advisory board organized 15 televised town-hall meetings. While the panel did not have authority to actually implement any changes, it did suggest a range of policy proposals for future action.<sup>62</sup>

The Clinton policy record on women is regarded by most women's interest group and social movement leaders as far better than that of any president who went before. The White House maintained special channels relating to women's policy issues, including the White House Office for Women's Initiatives and Outreach and the President's Interagency Council on Women. The Office of the First Lady also focused considerable attention on women's issues, both domestically and in other countries.

Women's groups did not forget that the first act pushed and signed into law by the new president in 1993 was the Family and Medical Leave Act, a much weaker form of parental leave than is available in most other OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries, but nevertheless, one that took the United States off the very small list of countries lacking a parental-leave policy. Given the relative poverty of women, most of the policies aimed at assisting the poorest Americans also give particular assistance to women. Clinton supported legislation that toughened enforcement of child-support collec-

tions. Non-payment of court-ordered child support by fathers has long been one of the major factors contributing to the poverty of single mothers. At the same time, the restrictions posed by the welfare reform law have particularly severe effects on women. Clinton often pointed out that he had vetoed welfare reform laws that he regarded as more punitive and initiated efforts later to relax some of the harsher provisions.

Despite the failure of the comprehensive health care reform plan, an issue women regard as very important, a number of specific policies aimed at women and children's health have been important for women and have received a lot of support within the women's policy community: expanding health care for uninsured children, increasing funding for breast-cancer research and improving access to mammography, requiring hospitals to allow at least forty-eight-hour stays in hospitals following mastectomies, and developing a program for combating osteoporosis. Key portions of the "patients' bill of rights" that Clinton pushed (and that was buried by the Republican House shortly before the 1998 election) were the requirements that insurers cover at least forty-eight hours of hospitalization following childbirth and at least seventy-two hours following a cesarean delivery and that women have access to obstetricians during a pregnancy.

Perhaps the best-known policies endorsed by Clinton that found great favor among women's group leaders related to violence in general, but especially violence against women and children. Women are consistently more in favor of gun control than men, and Clinton's Brady Law and its extension, which prohibits anyone with a domestic violence conviction from owning a firearm, were greeted very favorably. Clinton appeared to take violence against women more seriously than did any of his predecessors, resulting in his signing the Violence against Women Act and increasing funding for domestic violence shelters. For much of the women's movement, Clinton's pro-choice abortion stands were also crucial, including his opposition to further limitations on abortion rights and eliminating the "gag rule," first implemented under President Reagan, that had forbidden family-planning clinics with any public funding from dispensing information that might help a woman obtain an abortion, and his endorsement of the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act, creating a buffer zone around clinics in which abortions are performed.

The Clinton administration took strong stands against gender discrimination, the EEOC became more active than it had been under recent administrations (as in its sexual harassment suit against Mitsubishi), and the Justice Department was active on these fronts as well (as in the injunction against Vir-

ginia Military Institute for excluding women). Clinton vigorously supported continuation of affirmative action and, except for the Defense of Marriage Act, pushed for policies to eliminate discrimination on the basis of sexual preference, and he endorsed legislation and administrative rulings that would curb harassment of and violence against people on the basis of their sexual preference. Hillary Clinton's frequent trips abroad, especially to the developing nations, always included attention specifically to women's poverty, housing, and health care needs. The policy stands of the president were crucial for solidifying the partisan gender gap that had been long developing. As far as these leaders were concerned, they got not just symbolic politics, but real policy change.

### Gender and Race Coalitions in Contemporary Politics

*I'd like to know that your love  
Is love I can be sure of  
So tell me now, and I won't ask again  
Will you still love me tomorrow?*

— Gerry Goffin and Carole King, "Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow," Number 1 hit song for The Shirelles in 1961, when Bill Clinton was fifteen years old

Bill Clinton's skills as a political operative are clearly illustrated by his relations with key social groups that have come to be identified with the political left including, most notably, African Americans and women, but also certain other racial groups and gays. The strategies Clinton, as campaigner and Democratic leader, used with respect to these groups must be understood as part of the continuing process both political parties use to secure coalitions that will allow them to obtain and protect their offices, and perhaps govern. The New Deal coalition has long been under threat, partly because of the effects of race politics that began to peel away southern white voters in the 1960s and put them in the Republican camp. A wide range of policies, many having to do with race and gender issues, also eroded support among the working class, union supporters, and white ethnics. Likewise, they tended to weaken support among men in general in the late 1970s and 1980s, as the Republican leadership offered an explanation for the bad economic times that rested on the twin ideas of too many government programs (therefore not enough money left in the private family household budget)

and too much preferential treatment for women and blacks, leaving more meritorious white men in the lurch.

Many Democrats, therefore, realized they had to moderate the leftward image they had acquired, especially since the McGovern campaign of 1972, while Republicans played increasingly to their newfound strengths, swinging further rightward. The result was that African Americans, Hispanics, women, and gays became increasingly available as key elements of the potential Democratic coalition. Bill Clinton's policy views and political instincts put him in a position from which he could manage a delicate balancing act. There is no doubt that the balance did not always work. And ironically, given that Clinton early gained a reputation for wanting everyone to like him, this particular strategy was bound to make most people unhappy some of the time, even if, in the end, he maintained almost unbelievable public support in the aggregate.

Some Democrats were worried from the beginning that, as a leader in the Democratic Leadership Council, he would moderate the party too much. Simultaneously, he was criticized from the right as a tool of the leftist "special interests." In the end, he *was* able to offer some of the more moderate constituencies from the traditional Democratic coalition what they needed to come back to the party, as reflected in his consistent support for capital punishment and his willingness to sign the welfare reform bill. He also offered not just token policies to the more progressive wing of the party, but policies and appointments—practices that they found, if not everything they wished, a good bit further down the road than the opposition was offering. Clinton's strategic efforts were aided in no small measure by two other conditions: first, the economic strength that became apparent after the 1994 election (and allowed him to take credit for balancing the unbalanceable budget) and, second, the continued Republican strategy of relatively unmoderated conservatism. Thus blue-collar and union voters, who might not have forgiven Clinton for NAFTA (on top of all their other disagreements), still, in the end, found Republican attacks on the safety net worrisome.

Clinton has sometimes been accused of being a wholly political animal, with no strong commitments other than keeping himself in office and his public support strong. It is clear that while African-American and women's interest group and movement leaders have not always been satisfied by Clinton's actions in policies and appointments, they have indeed felt that he brought them "to the table," and that there have been tangible results. A reading of the White House website under Clinton is remarkable in revealing a persistent, consistent pattern of raising issues key to the agendas of these groups, and in terms and frameworks

more consistent with those groups' views than they had long come to expect even from leading (white, male) Democrats.<sup>63</sup>

We may also suggest another test. If the particular outreach to women and racial minorities was merely a matter of convenience, the final congressional election of the Clinton presidency should surely signal an abatement of those efforts. He did not, in fact, miss a step. On the day after the 1998 election, Clinton wrote a memorandum to the director of the Office of Personnel Management charging that office to develop a guidebook for federal officials who had suffered domestic violence and, additionally, he ordered that from then on a victim of domestic violence would be able to get a new Social Security number merely by providing written affirmation from a third party that she had suffered abuse. This changed the old regulation that a victim would have to prove that her Social Security number had actually been the cause of further abuse. Two days later Clinton appeared at an elaborate signing ceremony for a law designating Little Rock Central High School, the scene of one of the major desegregation battles of the 1950s, a national historic site. In his relatively lengthy remarks on the occasion, Clinton said that Little Rock Central was as hallowed a site as Gettysburg and Independence Hall. He took the opportunity to comment on the elections earlier that week, commending the importance of the high turnout of African Americans and also noting, in light of the events in the history of the civil rights movement that they were commemorating, that an African American had been elected attorney general of Georgia and that African-American members of Congress had been re-elected in what were now majority white districts in the South.

There may be specific policy legacies resulting from Clinton's concerted pro-feminist stands, but many of the specific policies he put in force can be reversed, just as he reversed some of the tendencies of previous administrations. Certainly, future administrations can slow the progress of appointments, perhaps making the administration look a little "less like America." There are certainly likely to be serious long-term negative consequences to women's groups from the Lewinsky affair, given the muddying of the waters over what constitutes sexual harassment and given feminists' determination to "stand by their man." But the effects on women's and African-American groups of having had a supporter in the White House will not soon fade even if Bill Clinton was, in so many ways, disgraced.

These pro-feminist policies and many of the policies the black community supports are easier to accomplish when the economy is strong, and Clinton has been able to capitalize on that. It would be difficult for the Democratic Party to

beat a massive retreat. But the most lasting effects could, ironically, be on the Republican Party. We are arguing that Bill Clinton was a master at understanding the political opportunities open to a moderate Democrat to crystallize a base of support crucial for a winning strategy. But the real lesson he taught may be to the Republicans who are already showing that they are unlikely to stand idly by—at least if they can neutralize the far-right flank—and watch the Democrats soak up the votes and support of African Americans and women.