

[National Review]

Whitewashing the Democratic Party's History

By Mona Charen

06/26/2015

Here's what the former president of the United States had to say when he eulogized his mentor, an Arkansas senator:

We come to celebrate and give thanks for the remarkable life of J. William Fulbright, a life that changed our country and our world forever and for the better. . . . In the work he did, the words he spoke and the life he lived, Bill Fulbright stood against the 20th century's most destructive forces and fought to advance its brightest hopes.

So spoke President William J. Clinton in 1995 of a man who was among the 99 Democrats in Congress to sign the "Southern Manifesto" in 1956. (Two Republicans also signed it.) The Southern Manifesto declared the signatories' opposition to the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* and their commitment to segregation forever. Fulbright was also among those who filibustered the Civil Rights Act of 1964. That filibuster continued for 83 days.

Speaking of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, let's review (since they don't teach this in schools): The percentage of House Democrats who supported the legislation? 61 percent. House Republicans? 80 percent. In the Senate, 69 percent of Democrats voted yes, compared with 82 percent of Republicans. (Barry Goldwater, a supporter of the NAACP, voted no because he thought it was unconstitutional.)

When he was running for president in 2000, Vice President Al Gore told the NAACP that his father, Senator Al Gore Sr., had lost his Senate seat because he voted for the Civil Rights Act. Uplifting story — except it's false. Gore Sr. voted against the Civil Rights Act. He lost in 1970 in a race that focused on prayer in public schools, the Vietnam War, and the Supreme Court.

Al Gore's reframing of the relevant history is the story of the Democratic party in microcosm. The party's history is pockmarked with racism and terror. The Democrats were the party of slavery, black codes, Jim Crow, and that miserable terrorist excrescence, the Ku Klux Klan. Republicans were the party of Lincoln, Reconstruction, anti-lynching laws, and the civil rights acts of 1875, 1957, 1960, and 1964. Were all Republicans models of rectitude on racial matters? Hardly. Were they a heck of a lot better than the Democrats? Without question.

As recently as 2010, the Senate's president pro tempore was former Ku Klux Klan Exalted Cyclops Robert Byrd (D., W.Va.). Rather than acknowledge their sorry history, modern Democrats have rewritten it.

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You may recall that when MSNBC was commemorating the 50th anniversary of segregationist George Wallace's "Stand in the Schoolhouse Door" stunt to prevent the integration of the University of Alabama, the network identified Wallace as "R., Alabama."

The Democrats have been sedulously rewriting history for decades. Their preferred version pretends that all the Democratic racists and segregationists left their party and became Republicans starting in the 1960s. How convenient. If it were true that the South began to turn Republican due to Lyndon Johnson's passage of the Civil Rights Act, you would expect that the Deep South, the states most associated with racism, would have been the first to move. That's not what happened. The first southern states to trend Republican were on the periphery: North Carolina, Virginia, Texas, Tennessee, and Florida. (George Wallace lost these voters in his 1968 bid.) The voters who first migrated to the Republican party were suburban, prosperous New South types. The more Republican the South has become, the less racist.

Is it unforgivable that Bill Clinton praised a former segregationist? No. Fulbright renounced his racist past, as did Robert Byrd and Al Gore Sr. It would be immoral and unjust to misrepresent the history.

What is unforgivable is the way Democrats are still using race to foment hatred. Remember what happened to Trent Lott when he uttered a few dumb words about former segregationist Strom Thurmond? He didn't get the kind of pass Bill Clinton did when praising Fulbright. Earlier this month, Hillary Clinton told a mostly black audience that "what is happening is a sweeping effort to disempower and disenfranchise people of color, poor people and young people from one end of our country to another. . . . Today Republicans are systematically and deliberately trying to stop millions of American citizens from voting." She was presumably referring to voter-ID laws, which, by the way, 51 percent of black Americans support.

Racism has an ugly past in the Democratic party. The accusation of racism has an ugly present.