The Democratic Dissolution: The John Barrow Story

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ABSTRACT

The South has undergone dramatic changes since the civil rights era of the 1960s. With the abolishment of segregation and discrimination throughout the region, the Dixie demagogues lost their juggernaut in the region. As the Democratic Party increasingly liberalized and the Republican Party rose as the party of conservatism, conservative Democrats began facing obstacles to election. As Republicans and minorities entered the electorate, they sped up the demise of white conservative Democrats through redistricting. Black Democrats were acutely dissatisfied with their underrepresentation and white Republicans were looking for an opening in the region. Thus, by forming a large number of majority-minority districts, black Democrats and white Republicans were able to dominate the electorate. This drove white conservative Democrats out of the region by polarizing the parties along ideology and racial lines, in which only white conservative Republicans and black liberal Democrats are now significant parts of the electorate. John Barrow—a congressman for the 12th District of Georgia—epitomizes these changes. As a white, more conservative Democrat, he is facing an uphill battle in his recently redistricted seat. In fact, he is the only remaining white Democrat in the entire Deep South congressional delegation. Moreover, all Democrats in the Deep South delegation are black and all Republicans are white—a completely segregated party system. The demise of racist conservative Democrats has drastically improved the regional order; however, the simultaneous collapse of moderate Democrats that cultivated biracial coalitions and stressed fiscal and social conservatism, rather than racial, has resulted in intense ideological and racial polarization.
INTRODUCTION

The “Solid South” remains infamous for its historic Democratic partisanship. However, Southern Democrats, who supported racial, economic, and social conservatism, bore little resemblance to their more liberal counterparts in other regions. This powerful faction of white conservatives dominated Southern politics from the aftermath of Civil War Reconstruction to the end of the twentieth century. Since then, they have faced innumerable obstacles because of interregional migration, generational replacement, and partisan realignment (Black, Mar. 2012). The growth of Republicanism has virtually eradicated white Southern Democrats. Indeed, the Republican-dominated Georgia legislature redistricted Congressman John Barrow, the last Deep South white Democrat, with the 2010 census, but he was able to hold off his challenger despite a more Republican district with a rural white majority in November 2012 (Isenstadt, 2011). With his climatic campaign, the remnants of the once inexorable force of white Southern Democrats faced extinction, resulting in irrevocable implications for race relations and political parties. Lawmakers have politically re-segregated the South through redistricting, thereby initiating a wave of political and racial polarization in which political parties are virtually uniform in ideological and racial composition. These changes were evident in Barrow’s reelection campaign in November 2012.

Who Is John Barrow?

Born in Athens, Georgia, in the midst of World War II, Barrow has roots in the Southern political arena (John Barrow, 2011). Both of his parents were military officers during World War II, and the Barrow family name has connections to the Athens area, with nearby Barrow County, Georgia, named after his great great uncle (John Barrow, Apr. 2012). He graduated from the University of Georgia in 1976 and earned a law degree from Harvard University in 1979. After serving as a law clerk, a Clarke County commissioner, and an Athens city councilman, Barrow decided to run for U.S. Congressional District 12 in 2004 (John Barrow, 2011).

The Evolving District 12

Originally, Georgia legislators drew District 12 with the 2000 census to include the cities of Athens, Augusta, and Savannah (Congressional, 2003). Encompassing part of Georgia’s “black belt” and including the college town of Athens, District 12 favored the Democrats (Black, Mar. 2012). District 12 contained the “agricultural areas south of Athens [that] are heavily African American” (Congressional, 2003). However, it also included enough white voters in rural and suburban areas to not warrant protection under section five of the Voting Rights Act (Kapochunas, 2005). According to section five, the redistricting of majority-minority districts requires pre-clearance from the Justice Department. Charles Bullock, a professor of political science and an expert in Southern politics, explains, “You really can’t target minority legislators [and, if] Republicans want to target Democrats, it’s the white Democrats who have their heads on the chopping block” (Kapochunas, 2005). Thus, Barrow’s District 12 remained vulnerable to revisions by state leaders.

Legislators re-drew District 12 with the 2000 census after learning a few lessons from their mistakes in the 1990s redistricting. District 12 largely replaced controversial District 11 from the 1990 census; the districts shared portions of 13 counties (Congressional, 1 May 2012). However, District 11 included a larger portion of the “black belt” and did not include much of Effingham, the heavily white and Republican suburban county of Savannah (Congressional, 2003). In District 11 of the 1990s, 61.4 percent of the population was African American and 34.5 percent was white, and the lines stretched across the state from Atlanta to Savannah to include portions of Atlanta, Augusta, and Savannah (Congressional, 1993). District 11 was “one of two majority-minority districts created by Georgia mapmakers in 1992 to comply with Voting Rights Act mandates to increase minority representation” and, indeed, it resulted in the election of the first African-American woman from Georgia in the House (Congressional, 1993). However, in “1995 the Eleventh District was declared unconstitutional due to the central role of race in
determining the boundaries of the district” (Fleischmann, 1997). Therefore, in 2000 lawmakers divided much of District 11 into Republican-leaning District 3 and Democratic-leaning District 12 (Congressional, 2003). With claims that lawmakers diluted the black vote in the 1990s with an obvious majority-minority district, Georgia legislators were forced to create a district that included fewer African Americans, which might favor a white Democrat.

Given that Barrow’s district was not under federal protection, Republicans were eager to tamper with lines. Georgia Republicans did not mask their joy about planning the demise of Barrow in November 2012. Sue Everhart, the chairwoman of the Georgia Republican Party, released a statement soon after the 2010 census redistricting, which notes, “The political tide in Georgia has shifted, and it is poised to wash John Barrow out to sea in 2012. Therefore, on behalf of all Central Savannah River Area and Southeast Georgia families, I would like to wish the outgoing Congressman ‘Bon Voyage!’” (Georgia, 2011) However, what she failed to mention was that state Republicans were the unnatural force behind the “tide” of redistricting.

With the new District 12 lines, the National Journal deemed Barrow as one of the “Top 10 Most Endangered Democrats” of 2012 and explained that “Georgia Republicans could easily dilute the four-term Democrat’s 44 percent African-American district by dropping black precincts in Savannah and adding heavily white Augusta suburbs. This would create a district much like the one in effect during the late 1990s, a period when Democrats were locked out in the region” (Wasserman, 2011). Indeed, the new district excludes Savannah entirely but includes several rural Republican counties. This removes about 41,000 African Americans from his district, along with his Savannah home (Berman, 2012). Legislators severed off Athens and much of the northern part of District 12, and the district now expands deep into the swamps of southern Georgia (Congressional, 2003). Republicans also removed Augusta’s inner city, leaving only the heavily white and Republican suburban areas (Black, Mar. 2012). In the former district 55 percent voted for Barack Obama in 2008 but in the redrawn district only 40 percent voted for him—signifying the difficult road to reelection for Barrow (Wyman, 2011). Merle Black notes:

In principle, if you look where his district is in terms of the presidential and African-American vote, which is about a third lower, almost all districts that look like this are held by Republicans. A Southern rural district where whites are about two-thirds of the vote almost always goes Republican. This makes his reelection more difficult (Black, Jan. 2012).

The methods by which state leaders manipulated district lines, which include certain shares of a race, highlight the racial issues inherent in redistricting.

**Racial Significance**

Despite every Democrat voting against it, the 2010 Georgia redistricting plan still passed. The move retained Georgia’s three majority-minority districts, added another (Wyman, 2011), and reduced the black voting age population in District 12 from 42 to 33 percent (Berman, 2012). Democrats alleged that Republican lawmakers “packed black voters” into majority-minority districts “in order to ‘bleach’ surrounding districts and make them more likely to elect a Republican” (Wyman, 2011). These majority-minority districts reduced the electoral prospects of white Democrats by reducing the demographics needed for biracial coalitions. This action led to white Democrats to decline from 76 to 33 in the Southern delegation of the House between 1983 and 1997 (Bositis, 1998). Lawmakers reduced the large number of “black influence districts,” created after the Voting Rights Act, where Southern Democrats had a shot at biracial coalitions. Instead, they created a few black-majority districts where African-American Democrats dominate and a large number of white-majority districts where white Republicans reign (Wyman, 2011). However, Georgia “found itself in a position of trying to comply with U.S. Justice
Department rulings on minority representation and court rulings limiting the role of race as a factor in determining district lines” (Fleischmann, 1997). In 2000 and 2010, Georgia lawmakers created majority-minority districts but kept them less than the 61.4 percent African-American District 11 from the 1990s that was challenged. Thus, they strategically crafted majority-minority districts that did not include a less substantial majority, such as the 55.7 percent African-American District 5 from the 2000s, which could pass scrutiny of the Justice Department (Congressional, 2003). Today, all three of Georgia’s majority-minority districts are between 50 and 60 percent African American (Black, Mar. 2012).

White Republicans were not alone in their quest to dissolve the juggernaut of white Southern Democrats, though. African-American leaders joined with Republicans because they wanted increased representation through majority-minority districts. African-American politicians were dissatisfied with their underrepresentation and used reapportionment and redistricting to forge political opportunities. Earl and Merle Black explain, “Given the unrealized Republican potential in many districts based on improved presidential Republicanism, reapportionment and redistricting might well accelerate a southern congressional realignment significantly benefiting white Republicans as well as black Democrats” (Black, 2002, p. 203-205). Thus, the redistricting plan was advantageous for white Republican and black Democratic groups in garnering additional reputation, and it effectively drove Southern Democrats out of the region. The redistricting plan ensured that African Americans would win some congressional seats but left many more seats open to Republican opportunists (Farrell, 2012). John Farrell observes, “Shrewdly, the GOP cut deals with black Democratic candidates, using the redistricting process to squeeze minority voters into relatively few districts” (Farrell, 2012). However, as the long-term repercussions of majority-minority districts became more evident, this harmonious relationship between the groups collapsed.

This “unholy alliance” between African-American Democrats and white Republicans has largely disappeared in this election cycle because African Americans have begun to realize that it has net-negative effects on their power (Berman, 2012). Stacey Abrams, the Georgia House’s

Figure 1: This Politico cartoon was referenced in an article about Barrow and the Blue Dogs. The “Blue Dog” wears the same gold-rimmed glasses as Barrow and shows the demise of the “species.”
first African-American leader, notes, “Republicans intentionally targeted white Democrats, thinking that as an African-American leader I wouldn’t fight against these maps because I got an extra number of black seats” (Berman, 2012). Abrams explains that the Democratic Party must function as a racially integrated unit to accurately reflect the state’s demographics. Abrams adds, “We [the Democrats] will have the greatest number of minority seats in Georgia history and the least amount of power in modern history” (Berman, 2012). Although the original alliance led to an increased African-American representation, it actually has resulted in a permanent minority status for the Democratic Party in the region. With one new majority-minority district in November 2012, Republicans were garnered nine of Georgia’s fourteen House districts, giving Georgia Republicans the most clout in Congress since the Civil War Reconstruction (Wyman, 2011).

With about 95 percent of the Republican Party in Georgia now white, the significance of Barrow’s situation is startling (Berman, 2012). Although most of the country has united to promote racial equality, racially divided politics appears to be making major inroads in recent years. Hardie Davis, a Democratic senator, observes, “I think when you look at Barrow being the last white Democrat form the Deep South, it has historical ramifications not just for Georgia but for the entire country” (Isenstadt, 2011). Barrow’s position as the last standing Southern white Democrat intensifies racial polarization of politics because more than 65 percent of Southern whites now vote Republican, and over 85 percent of Southern African Americans now vote Democratic in U.S. congressional elections (Black, Mar. 2012). As the era of biracial politics continues to dissolve, a new order in which races become monolithic bloc votes could very well be the political future of the South. Moreover, the Democratic demise ensures that political fights will continue to be fraught with racial politics. Ray Strother, a political consultant for several Southern Democrats, explains, “We’re seeing the last of white Democrats elected in the Deep South. It’s amazing [because] the Democratic party in the Deep South has become the party of African Americans” (Isenstadt, 2011). As legislators continue to resegregate the South with district lines, the parties will only become more unified in racial composition.

**Political Implications**

The creation and redistricting of Barrow’s district have political implications for Barrow, both political parties, and the future of American politics. When District 12 was drawn, 51.9 percent of the population was white and 42.3 percent was African American (Congressional, 2003). Moreover, while there were enough whites to make the district unfavorable to a liberal Democratic politician, the district was diverse enough for a moderate Democrat to build a biracial coalition with a small percentage of whites and strong support from African-American votes (Black, Mar. 2012). Biracial coalitions were a tactic used by conservative Democrats following the Civil Rights era. Earl and Merle Black explain that “as the older Democratic segregationists departed, they were replaced by younger white Democratic politicians who understood that cultivating biracial coalitions was essential to their survival” (Black, 2002, p. 12-13). Barrow adopted this precarious technique of politicking.

With assistance from the national Democratic Party, Barrow narrowly defeated Republican incumbent Max Burns in his initial 2004 run (Harrell, 2004). He then used his shaky coalition to defeat an African-American Democratic challenger in 2008 and subsequent Republican challengers (Sack, 2010). However, Barrow won by just 864 votes against his Republican opponent in 2006 (McCutcheon, 2009). As suggested by all of his close elections, it is evident that Barrow’s political base was already fragile prior to redistricting.

To ensure that the political “wave” would engulf Barrow, Everhart and the Georgia GOP sought to make Barrow and Obama synonymous for Georgia voters. Everhart notes, “As John Barrow’s diminishing political fortunes continue to fade with each empty promise and failed policy of the Obama Administration, Georgia families are quickly realizing that Barack and Barrow are one and the same” (Georgia, 2011). She employed the common tactic of linking a more liberal incumbent president with a more conservative candidate and, thus, branded Barrow as a “liberal” in the ranks with Obama and Nancy
Pelosi. Historically, Southern Democrats have attempted to avoid the “liberal” label by professing to be “conservative Democrats” and set themselves apart from the liberalizing national Democratic Party. Sam Nunn, a U.S. senator who represented Georgia from the 1970s to the 1990s, once complained that his Republican opponent was making him out to be “some sort of liberal” instead of a “commonsense conservative” (Black, 2002, p. 81). Further linking the Southern Democrat with his national party, the National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC) launched a series of television ads during the Masters golf tournament in Augusta tying Barrow to Obama (Isenstadt, 2012). One advertisement calls Barrow and Obama “the wrong pairing for Georgia” (Barrow and Obama, 2012). Another ad features an eerie voice proclaiming, “There is a storm over our economy and, with Barrow and Obama, the storm will only get worse,” with dark apocalyptic clouds in the background (Storm Cloud, 2011). The NRCC also produced a site, “BarrowObama.com,” which features an Obama robo-call endorsing Barrow in the 2008 race. The website also contains a fake, stylized photo of Barrow shaking hands with Obama and a video of Obama and Barrow—portrayed as two shady figures—golfing together. The site’s tabs “Governing Together,” “Campaigning Together,” and “Double Dealing” only reinforce the connection (Working, 2012). Strother surmises, “They’ll make him a handmaiden for Obama, whether he was or not” (Isenstadt, 2011). By linking Barrow with Obama, Republicans made Barrow’s challenge of picking up a sizeable share of the white conservative vote more difficult.

Barrow combatted this portrayal by becoming even more conservative on several issues. Merle Black notes that “the first rule of politics is political survival” and thus “Barrow is moving to the right” (Black, Mar. 2012). Barrow was one of 39 Democrats to vote against the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) and one of 44 Democrats to vote against the American Clean Energy and Security Act—better known as “cap and trade” (Representative, 2012). He joined Republicans in vying for a 700-mile fence along Mexico’s border, voted to make it a felony to be in the United States without proper legal papers, and collaborated with Republicans in support of off-shore drilling, military housing, anti-drugs efforts, and deficit reductions (McCutcheon, 2009). He describes himself as a “flaming moderate” and is a member of the Blue Dog Coalition, “a group of fiscally conservative Democrats” (Kapochunas, 2005). Rachel Kapochunas observes, “During his first seven months in office he strayed from the Democratic mainstream about one-fifth of the time on party-line votes; fewer than 10 percent of Democrats have done so more often” (Kapochunas, 2005). In 2006 he voted even more with conservative Republicans by opposing his own party 35 percent of the time and supporting President Bush’s policies an astonishing 65 percent of the time (McCutcheon, 2009). Even with his centrist voting record, though, he is still facing the stigma of being part of the Democratic Party.

Barrow’s Democratic centrist approach mirrors the tactic that Jimmy Carter used when he won much of the South in the 1976 presidential campaign. Earl and Merle Black explain, “Winning the nomination and the presidency as a new, ‘centrist’ Democrat, Carter carried ten of the eleven southern states and appeared to blunt the Republican advance in the South” (Black, 2002, p. 211). However, Carter’s unstable coalition fell through in 1980 when Reagan realigned white conservatives into the Republican Party. Since then, few Democratic politicians have even attempted an appeal to the economic and social conservative views of the region. Bill Clinton campaigned as a centrist, adopting both liberal and conservative policies, and he “managed to split the South (winning four of the eleven states in each election, much as Eisenhower had done in 1952), but failed to revive Democratic fortunes among southern whites,” only capturing 35 percent of the white vote (Black, 2002, p. 218).

A few conservative Democratic factions in the region continued to exist after Carter and Clinton but enjoyed little success. One group of conservative Democrats “supported much of President Reagan’s tax and budgetary cuts” and united with Republicans during the Reagan administration to form the “conservative coalition” in the 1980s (Black, 2002, p. 180). However, the group largely faded after the
“Republican Revolution” of the 1990s because they often either switched parties or were defeated along partisan lines, often due to the 1990s Republican redistricting. In 1991 “the South’s delegation consisted of 72 white Democrats, 39 white Republicans, and 5 black Democrats” (Black, 2002, p. 13). However, just ten years later, it contained 71 white Republicans, 1 white independent, 37 white Democrats, and 16 black Democrats. As Carter discovered in 1980 and dozens of Southern Democrats realized in the 1990s, a centrist Democratic position remains quite unstable because it requires a precarious balance of demographics. Kevin Sack, a journalist for the New York Times, highlights Barrow’s difficulty in satisfying his diverse base with his vote against the PPACA by observing, “For every white conservative he may have impressed by breaking with his party, he seems to have alienated a black supporter in this district, which is 44 percent black” (Sack, 2010).

Barrow’s reelection has several political implications that will affect modern American politics. On one hand, the death of Southern Democrats signifies the demise of the institution of racism in the South that blocked Civil Rights legislation, held racially conservative viewpoints, and conducted unrepentant racist stump speeches to gain popularity in the region. However, divisive, ardent segregationists from the mid-twentieth century, like George Wallace, Lester Maddox, and Strom Thurmond, have begun to be replaced with moderate Democrats in the late twentieth century, like Clinton, Carter, and Al Gore. Following the Civil Rights era, Southern Democrats began moderating their racist views, cultivating biracial coalitions, and accepting changes to the color lines of the South (Black, 2002, p. 40-71). Moreover, between the Civil Rights era and their downfall in the 1990s, the existence of Southern Democrats may have been advantageous for the overall political climate. Once they started to act as a responsible and democratic group, these Southern Democrats lost control of the region. The dissolution of Democratic moderates has reinforced the political polarization in the country by providing a “clarification of party and ideology in Congress” in which very conservative Republicans or very liberal Democrats are the national and regional norm (Black, 2002, p. 36). Nelson Polsby, former editor of the American Political Science Review, notes, “The registration of black voters strengthened the liberal factions of the Democratic Party and encouraged conservative voters and leaders to desert the Democrats and become Republicans” (Farrell, 2012). Moreover, African-American alignment into the Democratic Party and white conservative realignment into the Republican Party intensified the liberal tendencies of Democrats and the conservative tendencies of Republicans, leaving few safely in between.

On a national level, much of the current political polarization relates to the demise of Southern Democrats. Polsby explains that due to interregional migration, the Republican influx has altered the entire landscape of American politics. In summary, Polsby’s argument of the end of Southern Democrats and the rise of Republicans affected American politics are logical. Despite their obvious flaws in promoting racial conservatism, Southern Democrats did balance out their liberal counterparts in other regions. Earl and Merle Black explain that the exodus of conservative Southern whites from the Democratic Party has made the Democratic Party far more liberal and the Republican Party a conservative force. The Democratic Party’s demise, along with the growth of Southern Republicanism, led to

Figure 2: The original District 12. Later redistricting conveniently excluded Savannah, Athens, and parts of Augusta and moved the district into heavily Republican south Georgia.
ideological consistency within both parties and increased political partisanship, which initiated an era of polarization.

Cleavages between the national parties have grown sharper on a regional and national scale since Southern Democrats began to lose the region. John Farrell observes that no “Senate Democrat compiled a voting record to the right of any Senate Republican, and no Republican came down on the left of any Senate Democrat” for the second year in a row in the 2011 National Journal Voting Ratings (Farrell, 2012). He explains that this contrasts with the 1982 National Journal findings in which “58 senators—a majority of the 100-member chamber—compiled records that fell between the most conservative Democrat (Edward Zorinsky of Nebraska) and the most liberal Republican (Lowell Weicker of Connecticut)” (Farrell, 2012). Since Southern Democrats disappeared in the South, partisan gridlock has become endemic to American politics. Southern Democrats strayed frequently from party lines to vie for racially, economically, and socially conservative philosophies. While their initial fervent support for racial segregation hampered race relations, their subsequent led to stark regional, racial and political polarization, for example, “congressional leaders now sound, and act, like their parliamentary counterparts in foreign lands—voting in rigid blocs and, in times of legislative gridlock, calling for an election to put the question to the voters” (Farrell, 2012). This is evident in the recent partisan battles in Washington that have hampered political progress to the point of government shutdowns.

**Barrow’s Political Strategies**

As Barrow’s political fortunes waned following redistricting, he relied on the traditional Southern Democratic method to win reelection: personal campaigning. Merle Black observes, “Barrow has good people skills and can interact with his constituents well” (Black, Mar. 2012). Indeed, if the redistricting upset Barrow, he did not shown it to his constituents. After Republicans announced their redistricting plants, Barrow simply said that he looks “forward to getting to know the new constituents drawn in to Georgia’s 12th District, and building on the friendships I’ve formed with folks who still call the 12th District home” (Isenstadt, 2011). Richard Fenno, in his book Congress at the Grassroots, observes that Southern Democrats often run on a “person-intensive representational strategy” which is shaped by “unbroken electoral successes” (Fenno, 2000, p. 80). However, he notes that a Southern Democrat’s “accumulation of personal negotiations over years of personal engagement” with constituents becomes vulnerable to “the prospect of increased policy conflict between his old and new constituencies” upon redistricting (Fenno, 2000, p. 53). Barrow conducted over 150 town hall meetings during his 2008 election and has maintained familiarity with his constituents through grassroots campaigning (McCutcheon, 2009). However, because some of Barrow’s “friendships” with District 12 were eliminated by redistricting, he turned to a combination of issue appeals and personal politicking to curtail his 2012 Republican challenger.

Barrow’s opponent, Lee Anderson, and previous Republican challengers attempted to sever Barrow’s personal connection with his “folks.” Contractor Rick Allen, a prospective Republican challenger in 2012, sought to appeal to his conservative constituents by noting, “Folks, I’m a businessman. And I’m not a lawyer. That’s what I do every day in business – solve problems” (McCord, 2012). Barrow had difficulty in overcoming the stigma attached by rural citizens to elite Democrats and Harvard lawyers in the region. Merle Black notes, “Harvard law has taken down a lot of political careers because it shows a disconnect with rural constituents” (Black, Mar. 2012). His original 2004 opponent attempted to use his Harvard law degree against him but failed after Barrow portrayed himself as “a gun-toting conservative with deep Georgia roots” (Koszczuk, 2007, p.295). Barrow has employed strategic campaign strategies to effectively remove these labels and characterizations from
Republicans. Barrow supports gun-owners' rights and increased Veterans' Affairs support; he has also been a supporter for the war in Iraq, politicking likely aimed at his district’s three military bases (McCutcheon, 2009). National Democrats placed Barrow on the Agriculture, the Veterans' Affairs, the Education and Workforce, and the Energy and Commerce committees to help quell claims that he is out of touch with his district (Kosczuzk, 2007, p.301). Barrow also produced a commercial in 2004, noting, “I approve of this message, and I approve of them Dawgs too,” offering a ringing endorsement to his beloved alma mater, the University of Georgia (Kosczuzk, 2007, p.295). Barrow attempted to forge an issues connection with voters. He campaigned with Republican Mike Rogers to remove key parts of the PPACA mandate, which “hampered” private insurance companies (Barrow Continues, 2011). Additionally, Barrow capitalized on his more rural district by recently conducting the “Rural Listening Tour 2012” to discuss agricultural issues with constituents. In his campaign, he vowed to protect farmers and fight against EPA regulations and pledged to slash wasteful government spending (Congressman, 2012). At the same time though, he touted to African American Democrats, through fliers and television spots targeting the group, that he has voted with the Obama administration and Democratic Party 85 percent of the time. Barrow proclaimed that he voted against the PPACA to his more conservative audiences, while noting that he voted against the repeal of the PPACA to his liberal constituents. Merle Black notes that he engaged in stealth campaigning in which he attempted to build a biracial coalition by discussing his conservative views and votes to his conservative and white constituents and liberal views and votes to his liberal and black constituents, depending on his setting. Moreover, his successful shaky coalition strategy depended upon the ignorance of both sets of voters (Congressman, 2012).

**Conclusion**

Despite Barrow’s more centrist approach to governance, he had to overcome an uphill battle in November 2012. Regardless of his voting record, the “D” beside his name threatened to turn District 12 red in November. Barrow’s story highlights the difficulties of expanding and maintaining a political coalition as a centrist politician. It seems that success in politics requires loyalty to a particular party line or demographics. Voting along party lines and appealing to one demographic remains a much simpler, smarter, and easier method for political fortune. If the grave of John Barrow is filled in the 2014 House elections, few are likely to attempt a centrist coalition approach. Redistricting tactics could mean that racial and political polarization will continue to dominate American politics. The era of the conservative Democrats has virtually ended, and the gridlock will continue to prevail over compromise in the foreseeable future.

**References**


Gavin Lewis was born in Waycross, a small town in rural south Georgia, in 1992. He attended high school there and graduated in 2011 from Ware Magnet School. He is currently a Sophomore majoring in Political Science and Economics, pursuing concentrations in national politics and economic history. His research interests are American Conservatism, Southern politics, and race and redistricting. Coming from the Deep South, he became interested in the odd politics of the region at a young age and hopes that this piece will shed some light on one of the greatest partisan realignments in political history—the collapse of the solid blue South and the rise of a red hue in the political landscape.