

Cartoons and Polarizing Political Rhetoric: A History of the Party Switch of 1964 as Told Through the Strom Thurmond Collection Cartoons Series

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Cartoons have chronicled the history of polarizing political rhetoric throughout major shifts in US politics. When US Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina and other noteworthy Democrats shifted their allegiances to the Republican party in the early 1960s, cartoonists captured the swing of the political pendulum. Using Strom Thurmond's personal papers in the Strom Thurmond Collection (part of Clemson University's Special Collections & Archive), this study examines 16 political cartoons depicting Thurmond's party switch from his own archive. A content analysis of these cartoons illustrates a focus on setting and character affect as polarizing political rhetoric, plot cues indicating Thurmond's role as a catalyst in the party switch, and narrator depictions of Southern-ness as central to the time period. In addition, special attention is given to several cartoons which are signed originals provided to the senator by the cartoonists.

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Polarizing political rhetoric has been a source of both ire and esteem for varying factions of the United States populace over the history of the nation. And such rhetoric has a rich history in the political cartoons published by US newspapers. The Library of Congress and other libraries across America have archived political cartoons and staged exhibits surrounding the power of the pen and the cartoonists that wield them. In a recent exhibit featuring the work of prolific cartoonist Herbert Block, the curator quoted the cartoonist saying, "A cartoon does not tell everything about a subject. It's not supposed to. No written piece tells everything either. As far as words are concerned, there is no safety in numbers. The test of a written or drawn commentary is whether it gets at an essential truth" (Billington, 2010). Such exhibitions speak to the national significance of political cartoons as a voice of both reason and satire, regardless of the individual cartoonist's political leanings.

Contemporary political cartoonists "translate political abstractions into tangible visual representations" (Hess & Northrup, 1996, p. 14). These representations make accessible the political battles and theoretical ideas of the daily news. Thus, American political figures across the nation have been inspirations for and satirical foci of editorial cartoons. Presidents, senators, congressmen, high ranking national officials, and state and local officials have been represented in comic form by news providers nationwide. Like his

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congressional colleagues, for South Carolina politician Strom Thurmond, these political cartoons trace a history of service to state and nation.

This study focuses on cartoons surrounding a history of this intersection of polarizing political rhetoric and cartooning, and specifically those cartoons surrounding Thurmond's switch from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party in 1964.

Political Cartoons & the Strom Thurmond Archive

"Today is the day of the picture..." writes Isabel Simeral Johnson in the first volume of *Public Opinion Quarterly* (1937), "Cartoonists have long been important and useful to society. The future promises them an even more decisive role, and an even greater responsibility" (p. 44). In her article, she chronicled the history of the rise of (editorial) cartooning in newspapers across Europe and the US, citing Benjamin Franklin's now historic "Join or Die" cartoon (May 9, 1754) in his *Pennsylvania Gazette* as the first example of American cartooning. Originating long before America during the time of Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation, cartoons were originally used to appeal to the illiterate, who then made up a large portion of society (Hess & Northrup, 1996).

Not until Medhurst and DeSousa's (1981) exploration of political cartoons did researchers establish a prevailing method for the study of the rhetoric of political cartoons. In their seminal work, Medhurst and DeSousa devised a taxonomy for the study of political cartoons, using neo-classical canons of rhetoric combined with the visual study of graphic techniques. In concert, this unified approach laid a foundation for the study of political cartoons as a persuasive medium in the context of their contemporary political environments. Their study reminds students of media that "the effectiveness of any given caricature is dependent to a much greater degree on audience ability and participation than on artistic creativity and talent" (p. 205). The medium relies heavily on the audience to be able to decipher and construct meanings from the cues in the cartoon itself. In addition to Medhurst and DeSousa's method, other methods of study have influenced and been influenced by their work, including the empirical models (Bormann, Koester, & Bennett, 1978) and structuralist approaches (Morris, 1993).

Medhurst and DeSousa's study gave rise to a variety of studies of cartoons as markers of political rhetoric and narrative at crucial junctures in recent history. The study of political cartoons has provided context for prevailing sentiments and concerns. Edwards (1997) explores the 1988 US Presidential campaign. Diamond (2002) assessed political cartoons to contextualize the Muslim and Arab experience of the days following September 11. DeHart & Pombo (2004) explore Brazilian cartoons surrounding the 2004 US Presidential election.

Perhaps one of the most well-known American cartoonists, Thomas Nast, composed famous cartoons in the late 1800s concerning Boss Tweed and Tammany Hall and solidified political cartoons as agents of satire and change in American society: "The mythic poser of cartoons has continued to grow since Thomas Nast took on William Tweed, placing the cartoonists' role in an exalted position as a standard-bearer for integrity and truth in journalism, as the voice of the common sense—the boy revealing that the emperor has no clothes" (Hess & Northrup, 1996, p. 10). Of special importance to this study are the origins of the donkey and elephant as symbols of the Democrat and Republican parties, which were born in political cartoons. Whereas the Democrats'

donkey is thought to have first appeared around the time of President Andrew Jackson, the GOP elephant first made the papers in Thomas Nast's November 7, 1874 cartoon in *Harper's Weekly* (Hess & Northrup, 1996).

Katz's (2004) history of political cartoons reminds us that cartooning since Franklin has fluctuated as a medium, gravitating at polarizing times toward partisan ideologies and iterating across two Golden Ages: once during the days of Nast and his crusade against New York City's "Boss" Tweed in the 1870s, and then again in the 1970's, culminating with Herbert Block winning his fourth Pulitzer Prize for his cartoons surrounding the Watergate scandal and then-President Nixon. In fact, one of Block's cartoons from 1964 is a focal point of the current study. The political cartoonists' value is in their ability to speak truth to power and to clarify complex geo-political issues into approachable visuals. "The future of editorial cartooning in America is uncertain," Katz writes, "but the past holds lessons for all of us" (p. 44). As Lawrence (2014) suggests, the political cartoons of the past can draw connections for readers in the present by illustrating connections that were once overlooked or unrecognized as broader historical patterns.

But, this past and its lessons are often difficult to uncover. Shaw (2007) laments the relative scarcity of studies of political cartoons compared to other forms of political expression. He notes several reasons for this "neglect": (1) cartoons are contemporary art published in daily life and perhaps seen as less valuable, important, or collectible, (2) the process of printing in newspapers and magazines contributes to short shelf-life giving each cartoon many copies but few long-term archival options, (3) microfilm records preserved newsprint well but their high-contrast nature didn't function well for cartoons, and (4) few indices exist for searching cartoons in full copies of newspapers (pp. 749–750). These challenges require that researchers turn to a variety of alternative sources for curating thematic studies of political cartoons.

Over his lifetime, Strom Thurmond served as governor of South Carolina and US Senator. He was a presidential candidate in one century and served as US Senate President Pro-Tempore in the next. Clemson University Special Collections and Archive contains the Strom Thurmond Collection, documents maintained in Thurmond's personal, donated papers and other items retrieved from national news providers. These papers depict historical moments in his career from his run for President as a Dixiecrat in the 1948 presidential election; to his stances against civil rights; to his record-setting filibuster on the Senate floor in 1957; and to his tenure of service in the Senate: some 48 years from 1954 until 2003. Among these documents exists a collection of cartoons relating to Strom Thurmond's service.

One of the major issues for political cartoons is their impermanence: "Once they were tacked on tavern walls; today they are hung on refrigerator doors, Xeroxed, faxed, and eventually forgotten" (Hess & Northrup, 1996, p. 20). Judging by the number of files on display in the political cartoon section of his personal archive, observers might assume that Senator Thurmond wanted to chronicle this impermanent medium. The collection houses volumes of political cartoons donated by Thurmond to the university. Some are original pen-and-ink drawings—gifts from the cartoonist to the Senator. Some were clippings of national newspapers mailed to the senator with notes from friends. Others could have been clipped from newsprint by the Senator himself or members of his staff. The cartoons included in this archive were collected, saved, and donated in an open collection as part of his personal papers. Thus, the cartoons are not an exhaustive

collection of cartoons referencing Thurmond. Rather, they are cartoons that bore special importance to Thurmond and were kept (for any number of reasons) among his papers.

As previously noted, this study focuses on cartoons surrounding Thurmond's switch from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party in 1964. Party switching, like the switch committed by Thurmond in 1964, was not new for the senator from South Carolina. He won as a Democrat in the South Carolina gubernatorial race, ran for president as a Dixiecrat in 1948, was elected to the U.S. Senate as a write-in candidate in 1954, affiliated with the Democratic party, and switched to the Republican party in 1964. His repeated partisan malleability was the primary subject of one of the cartoons in this archive, Parker's (1964) "Well, He's A Man Of Strong Convictions...".

This study aims to identify major themes through a textual analysis of the political cartoons featuring Strom Thurmond at the polarizing time of his party switch in 1964. For this study, cartoons were gathered from the Strom Thurmond Collection. Cartoons were selected if they were (1) present in the archive's files from 1960 – 1967 and (2) related to Thurmond's party switch in 1964. A textual analysis of these cartoons was performed to (1) identify common themes by noting historically significant inclusions in the cartoons, and (2) chronicle personal notes to Thurmond by the artists.

Analysis

This study highlights major themes present among 16 cartoons existing in Strom Thurmond's personal archive. Among the cartoons, three major themes were identified: (1) setting and character as polarizing rhetoric, (2) plot illustrating Strom Thurmond as catalyst and (3) narrator offerings of connotations of Southern-ness from multiple perspectives. In addition, six of the cartoons analyzed were autographed originals given to Thurmond by the cartoonists.

Setting & Character as Polarizing Rhetoric

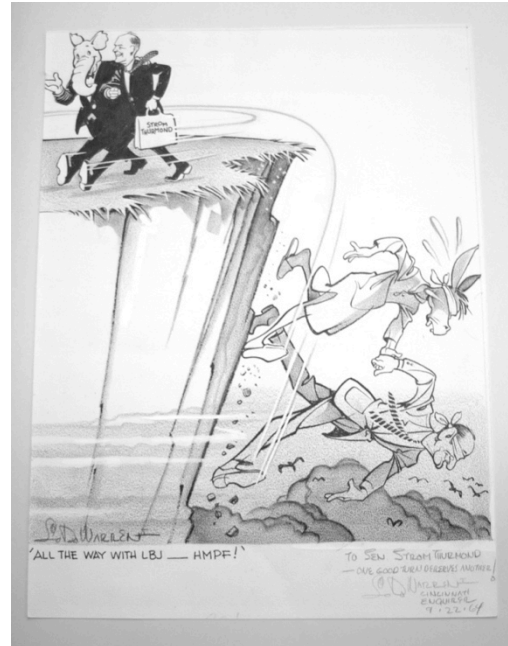
The timing of this party switch depicted in these cartoons is important historically. In the 1964 presidential election, Lyndon Johnson and the Democrats won a sweeping majority only losing South Carolina, Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana to Republican contender Barry Goldwater, along with Goldwater's home state of Arizona. The former "Dixie-crats," with Strom Thurmond as their most noteworthy face, left the Democratic party and aligned with Goldwater's Republican party. Ten cartoons reveal depictions of Goldwater's Republicans and Johnson's Democrats as they relate to the party switch.

The first group of cartoons uses setting to portray negative sentiment about Goldwater and his Republican party, now joined by Thurmond. Tom Engelhardt's (1964) "Requesting Permission to Come Aboard, Suh'" depicts a ragged Goldwater aboard a shaky log raft. The *Milwaukee Journal's* (1964) "Nice Cozy Cave You've Got There" depicts Goldwater hiding in a dark cave. Herbert Block's (1964) depicts Goldwater's party with members of radical extremist groups on stage, omitting the presence of an audience. Each image illustrates a faltering or precarious setting to indicate a party in distress, lacking strength.

The second group of cartoons uses character design employing emotional affect to depict the positive response of Democrats to the switch. Gene Basset's (1964) "Barry, I've Decided to Change Sides" depicts a line in the sand with a gleeful Thurmond flying toward an unemotional Goldwater. Democrat Lyndon Johnson smirks in the background. Jim Morgan's (1964) "Changing Partners" depicts a donkey frustrated but relieved by Thurmond's decision. The donkey—clad in a cocktail dress as Thurmond's previous dance partner—sighs, "He kept stepping on my toes anyway" as Thurmond dances the night away with a voluptuous elephant. Mauldin (1964) and Grant (1964) also use the donkey to symbolize the Democrats response. Bill Mauldin's (1964) "Some Weep Because They Part..." depicts a donkey watching Thurmond leave. The caption goes on to read, "and others... (weep) because they never parted." This sullen image depicts uncertainty about whether Thurmond's switch is a good thing for the party. Lou Grant (1964) portrays a laughing donkey wearing a black arm band to mourn the loss of Thurmond. The caption, "Oh It's a Terrible Loss," reveals the donkey's sarcasm.



Gene Basset (1964). "Barry, I've Decided to Change Sides." Original pen and ink with inscription: "To Sen. Strom Thurmond with best wishes." Clemson University Special Collections.



L.D. Warren (1964). "All the Way with LBJ — HMPF!" Original pen and ink with inscription: "To Sen. Strom Thurmond — One good turn deserves another!" Clemson University Special Collections.

Additionally, another set of cartoons uses character and emotional affect to underline negatives for Lyndon Johnson's (LBJ) party associated with the party switch. L.D. Warren's (1964) "All the Way with LBJ—HMPF!" portrays a blind LBJ leading a blind donkey off a cliff while Thurmond's about-face saves he and the elephant from a similar fate. Paul Conrad (1964) portrays a bruised and battered Johnson saying, "I knew Strom Thurmond might fight—but I never thought he'd leave."

One additional interesting play on this historical context of party preference is found in Don Hesse's (1964) cartoon "An Ear Doesn't Make a Whole Donkey." Hesse depicts Barry Goldwater as a Matador character who has cut off the ear of a donkey (to which the name Strom Thurmond is attached). This cutting could be symbolic of a coup for

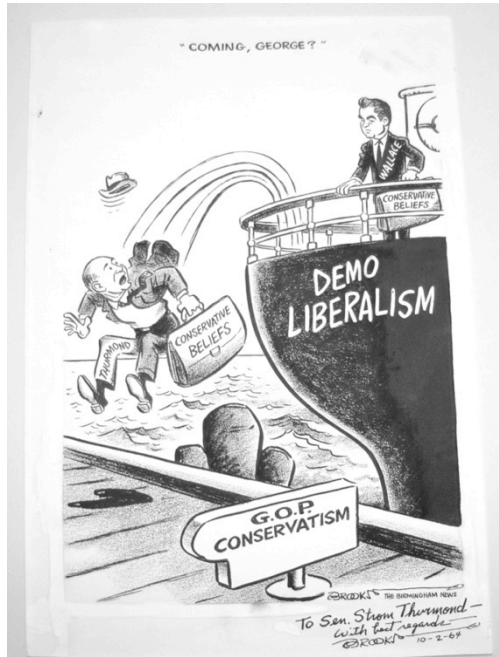
Goldwater and a whittling of the Democratic party through the switch led by Thurmond. But, it could also be read as a reminder to Democrats that just because an influential person leaves the party, the party remains.

Plot illustrating Thurmond as Catalyst

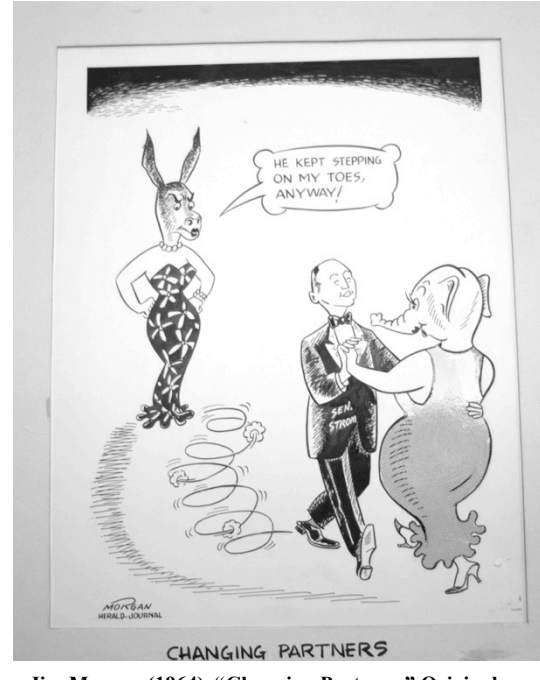
Five cartoons use plot cues to suggest that Thurmond was a leader and influential participant in the Senate only 10 years into his 48-year service. Richard Yardley's (1964) "The First Shot at Fort Sumter" depicted the beginning of the Civil War on the coast of South Carolina. He uses imagery of Charleston's battery, the island fort, and the South Carolina flag's emblematic palmetto tree and crescent moon to add to the context. The shots fired on Fort Sumter were the first of the Civil War. Yardley's depiction of Fort Sumter as the Democrats' Southern stronghold reflects Thurmond's instigation of the party switch. He labeled Strom Thurmond's decision an explosive "bolt"—the first shots fired at what Yardley calls "the 'solid' Democratic South."

In "Nice Cozy Cave You've Got Here," the *Milwaukee Journal* (1964) depicted Thurmond as a brontosaurus. The drawing of Thurmond as a larger than life dinosaur creates that idea that the party switch was a monstrous change (and the dinosaur offers an interesting foreshadowing of what would later become Thurmond's record tenure of service). In the cartoon, Goldwater is an unknown beast in the cave, being visited by what we must assume is a much larger, more commanding presence in Thurmond.

Charles Brooks' (1964) "Coming George?" and Jim Morris' (1964) "Changing Partners" depict Thurmond as a leader in this switch. In "Coming George?" Thurmond is the first to jump ship and he calls back to George Wallace—a representative for others with "conservative beliefs"—asking them if they are coming. In "Changing Partners," Thurmond is the suited, male leader of the dance and changes partners with the passive, female parties. The dance partners appear interchangeable while Thurmond is given agency and movement while leading the dance. In both cartoons, Thurmond's actions are represented by motion lines (jumping and twirling) while others pictured in the images are depicted as followers.



Charles Brooks (1964). "Coming George?"
Original pen and ink with inscription: "To Sen. Strom Thurmond – with best regards." Clemson University Special Collections.



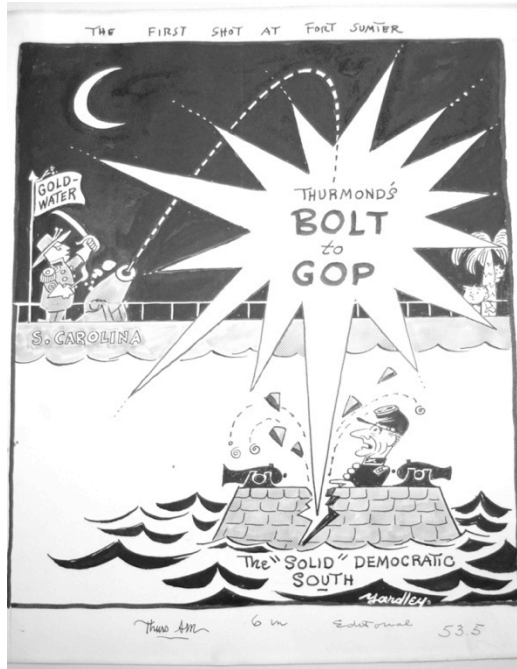
Jim Morgan (1964). "Changing Partners." Original pen and ink. Clemson University Special Collections.

This theme of the use of plot elements to depict Thurmond as catalyst could be indicative of the political arena's feelings about Thurmond as already discussed in the cartoons of Hesse, Conrad, and Warren, suggesting that editorial cartoonists saw Thurmond as a leader in the transition and the face of the party switch.

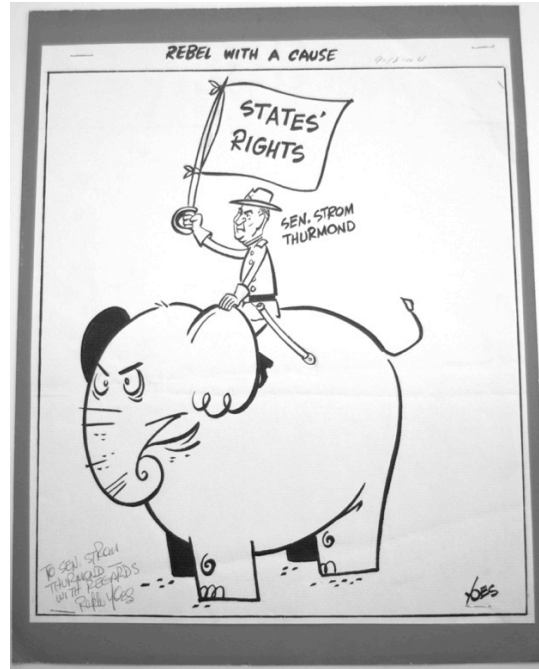
Narrator depictions of Thurmond's Southern-ness

The notable transition of the parties in the 1960s was the shift in both parties as those against Civil Rights moved to the Republican party and those with a more liberal social agenda remained with the Democrats. This signified a major shift in the politics of the Southern states. Six cartoonists in this collection utilized carefully-selected, race-oriented Southern imagery to bring this issue into their comics.

As previously noted in the discussion of "The First Shot at Fort Sumter" (1964), Yardley used images of a confederate general and union troops, the cannons on Charleston's battery, Fort Sumter, and the emblems of the South Carolina flag to create a distinctly Southern cartoon later published in the *Baltimore Sun*.



Richard Yardley (1964). "The First Shot at Fort Sumter." Original pen and ink. Clemson University Special Collections.



Ralph Yoes (1964). "Rebel with a Cause." Original pen and ink with inscription: "To Sen. Strom Thurmond – with regards." Clemson University Special Collections.

Likewise, in "Rebel with a Cause," Ralph Yoes (1964) also uses confederate garb to depict Thurmond as a war general riding a Republican elephant under the banner of states' rights (also a remnant of the Dixiecrat party). This narration allows the cartoonist the artistic license to give broad historical depictions of the American South, and Strom Thurmond's deep ties to South Carolina and that state's history as the first-to-secede in the years leading up to the US Civil War are compelling fodder for such narration.

In both Guernsey LePelley's (1964) "Now Dixie Goes Like This..." and T.S.'s (1964) "Not the Best Way to Improve an Image," Thurmond is depicted teaching the GOP elephant how to play the song "Dixie"—a song traditionally associated with blackface minstrelsy, and commonly referred to as the anthem of the Confederacy. LePelley drew the elephant and Thurmond sitting in a visually Southern posture: side-by-side in the woods playing banjos. T.S. illustrates this same elephant in front of a microphone discarding the score of "Battle Hymn of the Republic" to sing from the score of "Dixie." Strom Thurmond, the teacher, is sitting on the elephant's back wearing a straw hat.

In "Requesting Permission to Come Aboard Suh," Tom Englehardt (1964) reminds the viewer of the Dixiecrats floating along on a life preserver, rescued by the raft of Barry Goldwater and the Republican Party. The image of Goldwater, published in the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, reminds viewers of images surrounding Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* in which the white Tom and the Black slave, Jim, captained a similarly ragged log raft down the Mississippi. The language used in the caption is also reminiscent of the dialect used by Jim throughout the book.

Narrator explications of Southern-ness are perhaps the most controversial in "This Latest Recruit." Herbert Block (1964) depicts Barry Goldwater welcoming Strom Thurmond to the party while three figures sit side-by-side in the background, labeled the

“Republicans,” the “KKK,” and the “Birchers,” an anti-communist religious faction named the John Birch Society. His association with the South is, in this cartoon, narrated as a benefit for Thurmond’s political agenda; a negative for the Republican party; and an explicit connection to radical extremist groups.

Autographed Copies

Interestingly, six of the 16 cartoons in this collection were signed pen and ink originals procured by Thurmond, presumably as gifts. Those six are all included as photographed images in this study with permissions of Clemson University Special Collections and Archive. Four of them bear inscriptions of affirmation from the artist to Thurmond. All are addressed to Senator Strom Thurmond, and many offer “best regards.” These inscriptions demonstrate the informal relationship between Thurmond and the artists who penned this history. The four artists who added inscriptions to their originals were Ralph Yoes, Gene Bassett, L.D. Warren, and George Brooks. Notably, each of these cartoons depicted Thurmond in a relatively positive light compared to the other cartoons in the collection. Perhaps the relationships that Thurmond cultivated with these artists resulted in respectful cartoons depicting Thurmond as a productive and pleasant senator. Or, perhaps, the artists who depicted Thurmond in a positive light were more likely to send their work to Thurmond. Several of these pieces were encased in matboard, suggesting that Thurmond had them framed for display. One other possible inference is that the cartoons in this collection reveal more about Thurmond’s vision of himself and less about the nature of the rhetorical strategies of the cartoonists.

In addition, one of the cartoons, *Milwaukee Journal* (1964), was sent to Thurmond, presumably by someone who read the *Milwaukee Journal*. The sender jotted a note to Thurmond on the cartoon: “We always knew you were a Rep.” followed by an indecipherable signature. This inclusion demonstrates that Thurmond’s collection was bolstered by friends who clipped cartoons from their local papers and sent them to the politician, and further indicates that Thurmond saved all sorts of papers. Considering these mailings as sources for the collection of documents could add another dimension to the collection and its analysis.

Concluding Remarks

This analysis of the 16 cartoons in this collection is a brief precursor to the analysis that could be generated about the greater body of materials present in the Strom Thurmond archive. In identifying the themes of leadership and Southern-ness, this study suggests that Thurmond’s party switch was an influential moment in American politics worthy of drawing into the editorial pages of national papers. In addition, by identifying relationships between Thurmond and cartoon artists, this study has shown that Thurmond took special notice of these cartoons and their relationship to his work. By saving them among his papers, he maintained an archive of these cartoons and included them in his history.

One of the foundational claims of this study is that political cartoons are difficult to chronicle and search. Explorations of archives offer new compilations and narratives that retell the stories they housed. The physical space of the archive creates a fundamental

retelling, in this case, of journalism and political cartoons surrounding Thurmond's party switch. How much more so might archives tell stories of key moments in each of our lives? Exploration of the Strom Thurmond archive continues to raise questions about whose archives are preserved, how archives are accessed, and what voices can emerge from such study. Political cartoons in this archive are a fascinating story because they were collected by Thurmond, preserved at a university, and, in some cases, bear original, unpublished notes shared between artists and subjects of their art.

The researcher notes that this analysis is a narrowly-focused assessment of a specific collection of information. Therefore, further study is warranted into the historical significance of this collection (as well as alternative, hidden, and undiscovered collections of similar texts) alongside the greater body of papers and artifacts donated by Thurmond, both those related to this point in time and those that place these artifacts in a broad historical context. In addition, the exclusion of cartoons not included in the archive offers an entry point into an interesting discussion on whose history is being told, and who gets to do the telling.

Furthermore, this study has laid the groundwork for assessment of the relationships between politicians and cartoonists, suggesting that both impact each other in political discourse. Political cartoons reflect the tension between political discourse, political correctness, and political satire. Critical analyses of these pieces of visual rhetoric could continue provide a valuable window into American history through the relationships between those who make the news and those who draw it.

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The cartoons listed below are listed as they appear in the archive, not in the citation form of their original printing. These specific documents may or may not be correctly attributed to the news outlets listed, as many are originals with notations or other clippings delivered to Sen. Thurmond.

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