A Psychology of Human Strengths

Fundamental Questions and Future Directions for a Positive Psychology

EDITED BY LISA G. ASPINWALL
AND URSULA M. STAUDINGER

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POLITICAL SYMBOLS AND COLLECTIVE MORAL ACTION

DAVID O. SEARS

One of the most potent forces in human society is collective political action. This activity normally requires both leaders ("elites") and followers drawn from the mass public. In this chapter my main focus is on the behavior of mass publics, but the roles of both sets of actors must be taken into consideration. A second focus is on collective political actions that are carried out with an explicitly moral purpose. Examples include the civil rights legislation of the mid-1960s and the 1999 NATO actions in Yugoslavia to protect Kosovars of Albanian descent.[1] Of course, the moral purpose is rarely the sole motive, because economic and political interests are almost always also at stake.

In particular, the moral purpose often does not dominate elites' decision making but may be used primarily to justify the action rhetorically to a mass public whose support is critical for success but whose interests are not very obviously involved. Or a moral purpose may be used primarily to legitimate the action in the eyes of outsiders or opponents. Nevertheless, such qualifications are not crucial for the purposes of this chapter, as my

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[1] My examples will be drawn primarily from the world of U.S. politics, because I can claim little expertise at any detailed level about other political systems.

primary focus is on the behavior of mass publics. Whatever elites' "true" motives, I would argue that mass publics often do evaluate collective political actions in principled or moral terms. Philosophers, social commentators, and religious and political leaders have often regarded this capacity for collective moral action as a major human strength and, sometimes, as the most important of all. So it stands as a prime case of the phenomena treated in this volume. However, it is easier to conclude that such a capacity is an unalloyed human strength than it is to decide whether it is generally a force for good or a force for evil.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF POLITICAL MOTIVATION

One starting point in thinking about whether collective political action is a force for good or for evil is to consider motivation. Broadly speaking, political psychologists have approached the issue of motivation in two different ways. One is to assess whether political action comes from elites who are, crudely speaking, psychologically healthy or pathological. The mainstream view on this point has undergone quite a swing over time. In 1930, Lasswell published his pioneering *Psychopathology and Politics*, a study of political elites from the perspective of psychoanalytic theory. Its core thesis was that the political actions of individual activists were often motivated by quite personal and idiosyncratic psychodynamic needs and then rationalized as being in the general good. Even if such a psychological process had beneficial results, which it surely would on occasion, it plainly would be driven by irrational processes—that is, by elites' intrapsychic conflicts rather than by their objective assessments of the public good. In 1941 Fromm published *Escape From Freedom*, an analysis in much the same genre though focusing more on mass publics. Then *The Authoritarian Personality* (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950) focused primarily on mass publics but still highlighted the role of idiosyncratic intrapsychic conflicts. The emphasis on the irrational was surely, in these last two cases, much influenced by the phenomenon they sought to explain —the rise of fascism.

By the late 1950s, however, the pendulum had started to swing. In 1959, Lane published a contrasting account in *Political Life*, whose equally psychological theme was that political activists are ordinarily relatively healthy, happy, effective, and well-adjusted human beings. And recently a most popular vein of political analysis has used the theory of rational choice drawn from neoclassical economics (Mansbridge, 1990). This analysis begins with the assumption that individuals tend to act rationally and in their own interests within the constraints of limited information. Although the definition of interests is nominally quite broad (indeed, the omnibus term "preferences" is often used, and they are often treated as a

given rather than being analyzed in their own right), in the end most attention is given to economic goods or political power. In this theory, then, the psychopathology and irrationality of people struggling with their unconscious intrapsychic conflicts have been replaced by alert, reality-testing, objective, and rationally acting individuals. This shift of psychological emphasis toward rational choice theories—a visible though not universal trend—would bring political psychology closer to theories of "positive psychology" that prefer the view of humans as self-organizing, self-directed, adaptive decision makers rather than as passive vessels blown about by powerful external and internal forces (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

A second approach has been to develop comprehensive typologies of motives for political action. There are some striking parallels across disciplines. A number of authors have proposed typologies that contrast principled motives with self- or group-interested motives. For example, social psychologists have proposed functional theories of attitudes that distinguish the value-expressive and instrumental functions that an attitude might serve (e.g., Katz, 1960). Political scientists have distinguished purposive (principles) from material (self-interest) and solidary (group interest) motives (Wilson & Clark, 1961). The economist Amartya Sen (1977) distinguished "commitment" (concerned with morals and public goods) from egoistic (self-interest) or sympathetic (behavior that helps others with whom one identifies) motivation.

THE THEORY OF SYMBOLIC POLITICS

The role of principled or value-expressive motives in mass politics has been developed in the theory of "symbolic politics" (Sears, 1993). This theory involves several assumptions: that people acquire strong affective predispositions about particular attitude objects in their early years, that these predispositions can be quite stable across the life course, and that presenting appropriate political symbols activates those predispositions. For example, most Americans have acquired strongly negative, and quite stable, attitudes toward Nazism as they grew up. In adulthood, hate crimes attributed to neo-Nazis often will stimulate demand for punitive action and preventive legislation. According to this perspective, mass collective action should be triggered by political symbols that evoke strong predispositions in substantial numbers of people. It would therefore reflect principled action based on long-standing values or preferences, at least in part.

Everyone is familiar with the rallying power of evocative political symbols. Concord and Lexington, the Boston Tea Party, Bunker Hill, Valley Forge, and the storming of the Bastille all were used as moralized symbols to motivate support for revolution. The attack on Fort Sumter; the sinking

of the battleship Maine and the passenger liner Lusitania; and the attacks on Pearl Harbor, Kuwait, and the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were all successfully used by American leaders as symbols to motivate engagement in wars. The New York firefighters and police who died in the World Trade Center were used as unifying symbols after the attacks of September 11, and American flags suddenly appeared everywhere. On the other hand, President Lyndon Johnson tried to use the supposed attacks on American ships in the Tonkin Gulf in similar fashion to justify expanded military activity in Vietnam, but as is well known that proved less effective.

Symbolic predispositions tied to evocative moralized symbols can be perpetuated and reproduced across many generations. Some Muslims, most recently Osama bin Laden and his followers, have recurrently fought to restore a medieval caliphate unifying all of Islam. The founding of Serbia in Kosovo and Serbs' aggrieved reaction to the battlefield loss to 14th-century Ottomans have remained strong emotional commitments for many Serbs. The same is true for the city of Jerusalem, holy to Jews, Muslims, and Christians alike. In his Gettysburg Address, President Abraham Lincoln was able to appeal to the symbols embedded in a document written "four score and seven years" earlier, long before most of his audience was born. Civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr., mesmerized his audience with those same symbols in the March on Washington a century later, and they continue to have the power to move today. French schoolchildren as late as the 1960s still were highly politically polarized over the symbols representing support or opposition to the French Revolution, an event that had occurred almost two centuries earlier (Roig & Billon-Grand, 1968). In the 1990s, White Georgians who most wanted to retain the Confederate battle emblem in their state flag were those who had been reared and steeped in the Jim Crow system of the Old South: those who had been born in the South, who were most fond of the old Confederacy, and who were most racially prejudiced (Reingold & Wike, 1998).

Highly salient political events become particularly evocative political symbols if they become the subject of collective memory. Both the understandings shared among large numbers of people and the strong affect associated with such symbols give them a particular potency. A number of examples of such collective memories have been documented in recent years by Schuman and his colleagues (Schuman, Belli, & Bischoping, 1997; Schuman & Scott, 1989). What is most striking is that political events seem to leave their strongest attitudinal residues in people just passing from adolescence into young adulthood. For example, World War II was most often cited as an especially important event by the cohort aged 20 in 1943, the Vietnam War by the cohort aged 20 in 1968, and President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration by the cohort aged 19 when it began in 1938.

What are the conditions for creating such evocative collective memories? There are probably many, but two are suggested by the theory of symbolic politics. First, highly salient political events attract strong information flows, in the sense that they stimulate much media coverage and interpersonal communication. Such events therefore provide especially good occasions for the youthful acquisition of highly crystallized predispositions. This process was illustrated in a study of the 1980 presidential campaign (Sears & Valentino, 1997). Adolescents' attitudes toward the candidates and parties, the focal points of the campaign, became considerably more crystallized from the beginning to the end of the campaign. However, not all attitudes were so affected: Their attitudes in domains more peripheral to the campaign did not become more crystallized; none of their political attitudes became more crystallized during the year following the campaign; and their parents' partisan attitudes, which were more fully crystallized at the outset, were not much affected. So the socializing effects of the campaign were specific to younger people and to attitude domains that generated the heaviest information flows.

A second condition for developing highly crystallized collective memories should, by the symbolic politics theory, be political controversy. Intense debate provides clarifying and simplifying social constructions of the events in question. It also adds affect, as competing perspectives line up on opposite sides and the good guys and bad guys are identified. One example is the "riot ideology" that developed in Los Angeles after the race riots there in 1965. Over time, some Black people developed an increasingly coherent view of those events as a collective racial protest that would draw sympathetic attention to the legitimate grievances of the Black population (Sears & McConahay, 1973). Most White people developed the equally coherent but opposite view that it was simply a random explosion of antisocial and criminal behavior and would only worsen the conditions of Black people. These two views mirrored the contrasting elite views of some outspoken Black leaders, on the one hand, and conservative White leaders on the other, who debated these issues at length. Likewise, in its early stages the Vietnam War was supported by most American elites and most of the mass public. Over time, however, the elites became increasingly split, and "hawks" and "doves" in the mass public began to diverge sharply (Zaller, 1992).

But not all salient political events leave such evocative collective memories among young people. The Korean War evidently left very little (Schuman & Scott, 1989). Why it did not is puzzling, in some ways, because the casualty rate and elite debate were both intense, and divisions in the mass public were substantial. A more understandable example, perhaps, concerns the internment of West Coast Japanese Americans in World War II. It was not widely debated at the time. Also, according to one analysis, young internees themselves were so surprised, confused, and hu-

miliated by their fate that they were left with a desire not to think or talk about it for many years to come. As a result, few developed a coherent political ideology about it, quite unlike the civil rights and anti-Vietnam protestors of the 1960s, for example. Indeed, it took a later generation of Japanese American youths, inspired by the civil rights movement, to take up the cause and make it a centerpiece of their appeal to pride in their own ethnicity (Rhea, 1997).

A third example is the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963. He was widely admired among young people; his death was widely experienced as a tragic loss and indeed, for many, a first experience of the death of a loved one. This left a powerful and poignant collective memory among young Americans (Schuman et al., 1997), but perhaps a particularly conflicted one. A strong socially constructed account of his life and the political meaning of his regime took hold, which seems to have influenced political liberals for many years. But there was no comparable account of his death; no clear enemy emerged, or even a consensual account of the event, so that the great distress experienced by so many seems not to have been converted into any possibly vengeful lasting predisposition (Sears, 2002).

GROUPS: IDENTITIES AND INTERESTS

The symbolic politics perspective centers on the role of past experience in promoting the acquisition of symbolic predispositions. It contrasts with theories that highlight the role of realistic material self-interest in mass political action; if strong predispositions are acquired early in life, they are not likely to be based on careful calculations of one's own economic interests. Indeed, considerable research shows that self-interest, defined in terms of short-term material benefits and costs to one's personal life, is not a major factor most of the time in the mass public's political attitudes (Sears & Funk, 1991). Much evidence also indicates that human happiness has less to do with accumulation of wealth and economic growth than with such noneconomic factors as close relationships, work satisfaction, and religious faith (Lane, 2000; Myers, 2000). Such findings dovetail nicely with the theme in positive psychology that some of the most important aspects of the human experience involve neither markets nor money (Schwartz, 2000).

However, theories of the motivating power of interests are not exhausted by reference to self-interest. Indeed, collective moral action by its nature ordinarily involves groups, identifiable categories of actors with shared values who are in combat with some reviled enemy. Theories of realistic group conflict or of a "sense of group position" suggest that political attitudes are motivated by what is perceived as in the interest of one's

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group (Bobo, 1999). The theory of social identity similarly views group identity as central to one's preferences, though without the focus on shared interests (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1986). These theories describe the pathologies that are introduced into politics by conflict between warring tribes, each blindly attached to its own in-group and hostile to some out-group or another. At times, such as in the Balkans recently, such intergroup conflicts seem so ingrained and so intractable that they appear to be essential and inevitable destructive aspects of ordinary human life. And at other times, as with the medieval Christian Crusaders or today's Islamic mujahideen, the mass commitment to destroy entire civilizations on behalf of a particular religious in-group seems far out of keeping with normal human motivations.

For the sake of parsimony, a symbolic politics theory does not privilege attitudes about in-groups and out-groups in this way. Instead, it treats groups like other political symbols. One might acquire positive attitudes toward them, or negative attitudes, or even perhaps indifference in the course of growing up. For example, one might indeed acquire strong in-group loyalties, as Israeli Jews have in the years since World War II. But another in-group might not be a matter of strong attachment; blue collar workers in America have historically had a relatively weak sense of class consciousness. One out-group might attract strong negative predispositions, as in the strong anti-Anglophone feelings of the French Quebecois, the anti-German prejudices of many Americans during World War I, or the desire of Islamic extremists to destroy the United States. But another out-group, or the same out-group in other times, might not; most Americans currently regard Americans of German ancestry with equanimity.

These contrasting perspectives raise a number of important issues that seem to me unresolved at this time. One set is empirical: How central are in-group identity and interests in the real world? The "minimal group experiments" pioneered by Tajfel and his colleagues (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1986) are important reminders that group loyalties can be readily established without much basis in experience or real tangible interests. But they do not tell us much about whether or not they will indeed be established in more complex real-world contexts. Bosnian Serbs had generations of interethnic experience, not a brief arbitrary experimental manipulation. But then so have American socioeconomic classes, despite the relatively mild class consciousness that has traditionally marked American politics. To test the centrality of group interests in the real world requires direct measurement of constructs such as in-group identity and perceived group interests. So far such measurement is in its infancy (Sears & Henry, 1999). At this point one can say with some confidence only that if strong senses of in-group identity and interest are sufficient for collective moral action, they are not necessary. For example, extensive research has turned up little positive evidence that either group identity or group interest is centrally

involved in White Americans' resistance to liberal race-targeted policies (Sears & Funk, 1991; Sears & Jessor, 1996; but see Kinder & Sanders, 1996).

A second set of unresolved questions concerns matters of theoretical boundaries. The simple distinctions among concepts we began with do have considerable force, as indicated by the empirical research just cited. But at their boundaries they become clouded and other theoretical questions are raised. One example is the boundary between *interests* and *symbolic predispositions*. It is easy to distinguish an adult's realistic economic calculation about a personally damaging tax policy from a value acquired in adolescence. Critiques of economic sanctions against Iraq that result in the deaths of thousands of Iraqi children can be distinguished from a supposed religious duty to expand Islam by killing all Americans.

But where do threats to social status fit in? The "sense of group position" theory (Bobo, 1999) describes a minority group's threats to a dominant group's status as just as psychologically motivating as threats to its economic superiority. Again, the case of the Old South seems to fit that point well: Many areas of the South did not depend heavily on cheap Black labor, and many White Southerners were presumably not realistically threatened economically very much by such a poor and uneducated population, yet racism was virulent there. Issues of social status seem to have been central. It is unclear how those threats to status fit with a symbolic politics or realistic group conflict theory.

Finally, some forms of group consciousness are clearly based in a realistic sense of one's group interests. They involve actually being a member of a group, feeling politically close to it, and feeling a sense of common fate with other group members. But one also can imagine a more "symbolic" form of group consciousness, in which the real stakes are much less clear but the feelings just as passionate (Sears & Kinder, 1985). Some Jewish Americans feel quite attached to their religious identity and feel passionately about an undivided Jerusalem as a sovereign capital of the state of Israel. But what real interests are involved? A contemporary Serb might identify with those who lost a 14th-century war to the Ottomans without feeling any sense of common fate with those long-dead warriors. Are these similar psychological phenomena to those involved in a union member's support for union efforts to negotiate a pay raise?

ELITES AND MASS PUBLICS

What does a symbolic politics theory say about the relationship between elites and masses? To frame the question in terms of extreme alternatives, are mass publics like wind-up toys, to be energized and directed at

the whims of elites? Or are political elites mere panderers seeking to ingratiate themselves with the public for the purpose of re-election?

It is easy to depict mass publics as quite vulnerable to elites' control. But that power can easily be overdrawn. Ordinary citizens often have strong political predispositions that make them active players themselves. A good example is the civil rights movement in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s. In explaining both the passage of civil rights legislation in the 1960s and the realignment of the Southern White population into the Republican party, Carmines and Stimson (1989) focused particular attention on elites. Northern liberal Democratic gains in the 1958 election had shifted the ideological centers of gravity of the two political parties in Congress, with the Democratic party becoming more liberal as conservative Southern Democrats lost influence and the Republican party becoming more conservative with the defeat of several Northern liberals. Both sides later responded predictably to the "exogenous shock" of the civil rights movement. Lee (2002), by contrast, showed convincingly that this change at the elite level was preceded by over a decade of intensive grassroots effort, first by White liberals and Black civil rights activists, and then by White conservatives in reaction to them. Passionate grassroots efforts in the service of powerful long-standing symbolic predispositions can also further ignoble causes, of course. Goldhagen (1996) argued that a widespread "eliminationist" anti-Semitism among ordinary Germans was responsible for many of the horrors of the Holocaust, whatever the orders issued from on high by Nazi elites.

A second point regarding the relationship between masses and elites concerns the power of community norms. Lincoln's prosecution of the Union side of the Civil War was constantly jeopardized by the widespread racism then existing among the Northern White population. He treated emancipation of the slaves as a principal goal of the war only late and then with much trepidation, fearing that it would cost him the 1864 election and that his opponents would then negotiate a settlement that preserved slavery. Similarly, historians seem to provide relatively few accounts of strenuous White resistance to mob lynchings of Black people in the Old South. That leads one to suspect that community norms often accepted lynching as a legitimate response to Black people's supposed offenses. And whatever one thinks of Goldhagen's (1996) controversial thesis, the Holocaust plainly could not have occurred had fully egalitarian and inclusive norms about Jews dominated in the German mass public.

Finally, crediting mass publics with the capacity to generate grassroots political change in the service of what they perceive to be moral causes should not be taken to claim that elites have little or no role. Much is written about the power of elites to use the mass media to influence public opinion. To be sure, relatively little empirical research has demonstrated any great ability of the media to change strongly held attitudes in the

general public. Rather, the strong information flows reflected in extensive media coverage have typically been shown mainly to polarize people around their preexisting predispositions, as in the early "minimal effects model" literature on short-term media effects (Klapper, 1960; see also McGuire, 1986) and as symbolic politics theory would expect. Over longer periods of time, strong but conflicting flows of information to people with strong predispositions also tend to polarize them (Zaller, 1992, 1997).

Nevertheless, if elites have limited power to control what people think, their agenda-setting capabilities can influence what people think about, benefitting one side at the expense of the other by priming predispositions that work to the advantage of the former (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). President George H. W. Bush benefited by using the Willie Horton case in the 1988 presidential campaign to get voters thinking about Democrats' reputation for being too permissive about violent crimes committed by Black people (Mendelberg, 2001). Similarly, the Bush administration was successful in placing the Gulf crisis high on the public's agenda in 1990, and evaluations of President Bush became increasingly tied to evaluations of that venture (Krosnick & Brannon, 1993). Elites can also influence which predispositions are evoked by influencing how issues are framed. Framing affirmative action as providing Black people with unfair advantages may evoke racial prejudice among White people; framing it as reverse discrimination against White people may instead evoke feelings of threat (Kinder & Sanders, 1996). Likewise, framing bilingual education as intended to maintain an alien culture rather than as a way to teach foreign-born children the English language may evoke nationalism and increase opposition to it (Sears & Huddy, 1992).

SYMBOLIC POLITICS AND POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Are the processes described by a symbolic politics theory also examples of a psychology of human strengths? These two perspectives would seem to converge in appreciating the strong human capacity to become attached emotionally to abstract political symbols. Those attachments can readily be evoked by the ambient informational environment in adulthood and can form a strong basis for collective political action. This would seem to be a major human strength, of as much social consequence as any other human strength I can think of.

But these perspectives also diverge on an important point. Symbolic politics theory expects that the most politically important symbolic predispositions are likely to be acquired prior to mature adulthood, as part of a relatively passive social learning process by which individuals come to reflect the predominant norms of their social environments. They then remain largely stable throughout the life span. Some versions of the psy-

chology of human strengths emphasize, instead, humans' self-determination and need for autonomy and their continuing absorption with challenges and the unfolding of individual strengths through the entire life span (see Myers, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). To be sure, symbolic politics theory would agree that some political attitudes are under continual revision in adulthood, but primarily those that are simply not very strong and so unlikely to have much influence on major political decisions (Sears, 1983).

More wiggle room is provided by the general finding that symbolic predispositions seem to undergo a period of vulnerability to change during the "impressionable years" of late adolescence and early adulthood (Sears, 1990). An example would be students becoming more politically liberal when attending a predominantly liberal college (e.g., Alwin, Cohen, & Newcomb, 1991). Another example would be the use of madrasa schools by fundamental Islamic clerics in Pakistan to create a cadre of young Islamic extremists ready to engage in a suicidal holy war against the West. Symbolic politics theorists usually explain such conversion experiences as reflecting passive adjustments to a changed attitudinal environment (Miller & Sears, 1986). But the same data could be interpreted from a human strengths perspective as reflecting a process of more active deliberation and choice, though probably not with the same stage-specific limitation.

Are the processes described by a symbolic politics theory examples of a "positive psychology"? The moral purpose in collective political action is usually regarded as a supremely, perhaps even uniquely, positive feature of human nature. And some of people's strongest collective memories concern events whose effects are widely and consensually regarded as benefiting humanity in general. Americans almost universally regard the defeat of the Axis powers in World War II as their "good war." The civil rights movement and the accompanying legislation that eliminated the Jim Crow system is widely regarded as a major success story (even though many believe that "we have gone too far" in the direction of guaranteeing equality; see Sears, Henry, & Kosterman, 2000). By the same token, some powerful collective memories involve events now consensually regarded as having had horrendous effects. Few Americans today would restore slavery, and few Germans would restore the Nazi regime (although controversy still swirls about the scope of the Holocaust, and visible neo-Nazi and skinhead movements do exist).

But is this "human strength" generally used by ordinary citizens in the service of good, or is it also sometimes used in the service of evil? Symbolic politics theory would take the view that it does not work intrinsically for either good or evil. For one thing, whether collective moral action is positive or negative is in practice often in the eye of the beholder. The Crusades were justified as a way to promote the ideals of Christianity, but they were fiercely bloody and ethnocentric. The abolitionist movement

today is often seen as a necessary force in overthrowing an evil system of chattel slavery, but at the time many viewed it as undercutting the foundations of a civilized society. Lynchings in the Old South were often condemned, but many were justified as punishing antisocial behavior by Black people. Even the Holocaust was justified by Hitler's Nazi movement as having the noble goal of purifying the Aryan race from degrading influences. Many applauded Martin Luther King, Jr.'s, relentless moral impulse, but others thought him badly misguided or even subversive. Most view the killing of doctors who perform abortions as unconscionable murder, but others see it as having the noble goal of protecting the rights of helpless unborn infants. Some view the terrorist actions of devout Muslim fundamentalists as part of a holy war, or jihad, that will carry suicide bombers directly to an eternal paradise, whereas President George W. Bush has described them as "evil" acts committed by "evildoers."

The very considerable human strength of collective political action does not necessarily translate into beneficent outcomes for all concerned, then, any more than does the strength reflected by a powerful army or a rapidly growing cell system. It might be appropriate therefore to be cautious about equating it too quickly with positive psychology. The ability of elites to mobilize strong public passions through effective use of political symbolism can have constructive effects, it can have destructive effects, or it can have mixed effects wherein some people are benefitted and others are harmed. It is intrinsically neither good nor bad. But it is a powerful ability indeed. Trying to understand which direction it will take will remain a central question for political psychologists.

In this process, as Key (1961) pointed out long ago, elites bear a considerable moral burden of responsibility, both because of their inherent political powers and also because they greatly influence the grounds on which the public's predispositions will play out. In the case of the civil rights revolution in the 1960s, it is clear that much of Carmines and Stimson's (1989) attention to elite leadership is well placed. The Southern racial conservatives in the Democratic party had prevented any serious consideration of racial issues by the federal government from the 1930s until the 1960s through their control of key roles in Congress. When the civil rights movement could no longer be ignored, the enhanced strength of racial liberals in the Democratic caucuses in Congress and the leadership of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson and much of the Republican leadership in Congress, however reluctant and belated, were central to providing an information flow both powerful in volume and acceptable in content to the great majority of the American public and assembling mass support for radical change. At the same time, the candidacies of the conservative Republican Barry Goldwater in 1964 and of George C. Wallace in 1968 were centered on opposition to civil rights legislation and contributed greatly to "White backlash."

If a positive psychology holds that people make choices, and symbolic politics theory holds that political choices often reflect long-standing moral commitments, then one must remember that elites are human, too, and must reflect the same process, however much their choices are influenced also by desire for political and economic power. President Johnson, in 1964, chose to throw his lot in with the civil rights revolution, even though he accurately predicted that it would sacrifice the White South to the Republican party and so cost the Democratic party the substantial national majority it then held. It is perhaps ironic that Key's (1961) injunction was followed so quickly by elite actions that would fulfill just the responsibilities he called for.

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