

**Immigrants in the Popular Imagination:
Party Platforms as a Lens to Understand Immigration Policy Debates Over Time**

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The ongoing debate in today's politics over the relationship between Donald Trump and the Republican Party is far from new in American politics. The structural tensions between party members, voters in party primaries, state and national party leaderships, candidates running under the party's banner, and, particularly, the party's nominee for the Presidency have ensured that the question of who speaks for the Party is routinely contested. Contemporary examples of mixed messaging from a party in a contested election – such as the 1992 Republican National Convention in which Pat Buchanan's nativist "Culture Wars" speech drowned out incumbent President George H.W. Bush's more moderate claim on successes in office that were deserving of reelection – offer a warning to today's Republican leadership and, perhaps, to Mr. Trump about ways in which competing claims on what the party stands for can lead to disappointing results in the general election (Caesar and Busch 1993; Nagourney 2012).

Parties recognized this challenge soon after they became mass based and designed a strategy to create a forum to debate what the party stood for and what, in contemporary terms, are its key talking points would be in the general election – the party platform (Chester 1977). These documents have taken varied forms – short statements of key principals such as the 211 word platform of the 1860 Constitutional Union Party to the longer laundry-lists of principals and promises that routinely characterize today's party platforms (the 1972 Democratic Party platform, for example, was 25,615 words). The documents can certainly be easily dismissed. After the 2012 Republican National Convention House Speaker John Boehner – arguably the second most important Republican after Presidential nominee Mitt Romney – was quoted as saying "Have you ever met anybody who read the party platform? I never met anybody."

Romney himself also distanced himself from key provisions of the Platform, as had several of his predecessors as party nominees of both parties.

With these limits in mind, the party platforms offer resources for scholars. The major parties have authored these documents every four years since the 1840s. The Democrats' first platform was approved by the Democratic National Convention in 1840 and the Whigs followed in 1844. The first Republican platform accompanied their move into national politics (and the winning of electoral college votes) in the 1856 elections. Third parties and splinter parties also issued platforms (though these were generally far shorter than the major party platforms and tended to focus on the single issue that animated the party). In addition to their periodicity, the platforms reflect debates – sometime heated – among party elites both on the salience of issues to the party and the party elders' take on how to position the party on the issue to win votes. Although the convention ratifies the platform, the drafting is completed by a subset of delegates and party leaders, often in advance of the party convention. Amendments from the floor can alter the platform leading to early evidence of tensions within the party on specific issues. In the era before mass media, these documents were printed and distributed nationally as a tool to promote the party and its candidates nationally and became talking points for party adherents and opponents. As such, they offer a rich tool to assess how issues are framed and how this framing shifts over time. What can sometimes appear as a dramatic change in the relationship between the party and its electoral coalition with a new party leader can appear as a more subtle shift in the principles on which the party positions itself across several party platforms. As Paul Allen Beck observed in *Party Politics in America*, “approval [of the platforms] is not always *pro forma*, and the platform has occasioned some spirited convention battles because many of the delegates care deeply about the construction of the party's one statement of what it stands for. . . . Vague or artful as the platforms may be in their attempts to satisfy multiple interests and constituencies, they do define the issue, even philosophical, differences between the parties” (1997: 233-234).

The platforms have long been studied by scholars (see Boots 1923 as an example of an early study). I will briefly review the contributions of this scholarship in the next section, but I want to use them for a different purpose than has the previous scholarship. My goal here is to use the platforms as a comparative text that allows for a lens into the thinking of political elites over time. In this paper, I focus on the 19th Century. My goal is somewhat experimental (not in method, but in intent). It is for that reason, in part, that I'm focusing on the 19th Century for now. I want to see what's here and if this a fruitful way to analyze elite discourse on issues of race, immigration, and national identity. So, my goal is modest and largely descriptive at this stage. Should the opportunity to develop new insights prove fruitful, I will expand the study to all party platforms and other forms of routinized elite discourse on race, national identity, and immigration.

For the purposes of this study, I will analyze the 16 Democratic Party platforms between 1840 and 1900, the 12 Republican Party Platforms between 1856 and 1900, and the 4 Whig Party platforms of 1844, 1848, 1852, and 1856. I also analyze the party platforms of three other parties that received electoral college votes in this period: the Constitutional Union Party (1860), the Breckinridge faction of the Democratic Party (1860), and the Populist Party (1892). The text of these platforms, as well as more current U.S. party platforms, are available at Peters and Woolley (2016).

Scholarship on U.S. Party Platforms

The scholarship on U.S. party platforms has focused on several interrelated questions over the past 90 years. The earliest scholarship was simply collection, collection of the platforms with some discussion of the issues raised and the elections in which they were drafted (Chester 1977; Porter and Johnson 1974). More analytical studies of party platforms have used these texts as a lens to understand the party itself (Boots 1923; David 1971) and/or its presidential candidate (Patterson, Bice, and Pipkin 1999; Simas and Evans 2011); to measure

the differences between the major parties in a specific election (Smith 1992; Fine 1994a; Kidd 2008) or between states (Elling 1979); as a tool to understand interest group influence on the party (Fine 1994b); as a tool to measure congruence between voter issue positions and party performance (past and promised) (Pomper 1967; Monroe 1983; Poutvaara 2003); and as an indicator of party behavior once elected to office (Budge and Hofferbert 1990; King et. al. 1993). Simon (1993) used party platforms as one text (supplemented by print media and legislation) to show popular distrust of “new” immigrants. New in this sense is new to the period and, as such, as continuing dynamic in U.S. immigration policy.

The scholarship on party platforms (manifestos) in Europe is considerably richer (see Lehmann et. al. (2015); Schmitt et. al. nd; and Schumacher et. al 2015 as examples, both of analysis and resources). The larger number of parties and their issue- and ideological-base increases the importance of and competition over the text of the platform and the consequent resource for scholarly analysis.

This summary is intentionally brief in that my goal here is somewhat distinct from this existing scholarship (with the possible exception of Simon 1993). I am more interested in party elite issue framing and how these patterns change over time. Certainly, this speaks to the question the differences (and, as will be evident, some similarities) between the parties and how parties package themselves. My scope is more narrow in that I want to look at specific themes – specifically race, immigration, and national identity – over time.

Race, Immigration, and National Identity in 19th Century Party Platforms

The conflicts leading to the Civil War and its aftermath largely shape discussion of race and, to some degree, national identity in 19th Century U.S. political party platforms. The content and tone of this discussion clearly distinguish the two parties. Party platform content on immigration, on the other hand, sees many more similarities between the two major parties. Each moves from broad support for naturalization and the rights to the naturalized (the scope of

federal regulation of immigration until the 1860s) to restrictionist positions, initially narrow and scope and steadily more all-encompassing.

I should note that the outset that race, immigration, and national identity are never the most discussed issues in the party platforms and that the platforms themselves vary considerably in their length and degree of specificity (see Table One). The platform from the period with the most discussion of race was the 1856 Democratic Party Platform, which was itself a long platform (2,433 words) by the norms of the era. Each of the Democratic and Republic Party platforms from the 19th Century dedicated some of their discussion to race, immigration, and/or national identity. This was not the case in two of the Whig Party platforms (1844 and 1848) and, somewhat surprisingly to me, the 1892 Populist Party Platform.

[Table One Approximately Here]

Democrats

The Democratic Party Platforms of the 19th Century can broadly be divided into three periods – the period leading up the Civil War, the War years and immediately after, and the last quarter of the Century (roughly from 1872 on). Slavery dominated the race, immigration, and national identity content in the early years, with some opposition to religious bias added in the 1850s (in response to the rise of the American Know Nothing Party). The War and Reconstruction era platforms laid the groundwork for a return to two-party competition after the War and advocacy of states' rights and limited national government after Reconstruction. The Democratic Party platforms from the last quarter of the Century framed states' rights in terms of equal protection claims; this latter period saw a steady growth in anti-immigrant rhetoric, though an anti-immigrant rhetoric that was more tempered than in Republican platforms of this era.

1840-1856. In the pre-War years, the primary focus of the Democratic Party platforms was a defense of small government and states' rights. One element their defense of federalism and states' rights was an initially abstract defense of “domestic institutions” understood to be

slavery though not named as such. Article Seven of the 1840 Democratic Party platform was repeated with very similar wording the next four party platforms.

“Resolved, That congress has no power, under the constitution, to interfere with or control the domestic institutions of the several states, and that such states are the sole and proper judges of everything appertaining to their own affairs, not prohibited by the constitution; that all efforts by abolitionists or others, made to induce congress to interfere with questions of slavery, or to take incipient steps in relation thereto, are calculated to lead to the most alarming and dangerous consequences, and that all such efforts have an inevitable tendency to diminish the happiness of the people, and endanger the stability and permanency of the union, and ought not to be countenanced by any friend to our political institutions.” [Article Seven of the 1840 Democratic Party Platform, repeated with minor wording changes and different positions in the platform until 1856]

National identity also found a place in the 1844, 1848, and 1852 Democratic Party platforms through the question of Texas annexation and the War with Mexico. In 1844, the party called for the annexation of Texas. By 1848, party interest shifted to the resolution of the, by the time of the Democratic convention, nearly concluded war with Mexico. Democrats praised the justice of the war effort and demanded that the war continue until the Treaty (of Guadalupe Hidalgo – not named in the platform) be signed. By 1852, the Democrats took a victory lap and “rejoiced” at peace with Mexico. Their advocacy for Texas annexation and praise for the War certainly have a racial dimension – Texas joined the Union as a slave state with a large Mexican American population, but also spoke the national identity. There was little doubt expressed in the language of these three party platforms of the merit of the war of any doubt that the new territories would move toward statehood. Later in the century, there was much more hesitation about the outcome of wars that added new territories to the United States.

Beginning with the 1852 Democratic Platform and expanding considerably in 1856, the issue of slavery more to the forefront. Slavery itself, as opposed to the more ambiguous “domestic institutions” entered the platform text. In 1852, the Democrats resolved to “faithfully abide by and uphold the principles laid down in the Kentucky and Virginia resolutions of 1798, and in the report of Mr. Madison to the Virginia legislature in 1799; that it adopts those principles

as constituting one of the main foundations of its political creed, and is resolved to carry them out in their obvious meaning and import.” These resolutions – drafted in response to the Alien and Sedition Acts – asserted that states had the right to declare that Acts of Congress were unconstitutional, in other words to nullify federal laws.

Nullification again appeared in the 1856 Democratic Party platform as one of several very specific demands to take slavery out of national debates. The 1856 platforms also articulated support for the Compromise of 1850, for non-interference with the practice of slavery in the District of Columbia, for the right of the residents of territories to determine their policies toward slavery, and for resisting “all attempts at renewing, in Congress or out of it, the agitation of the slavery question under whatever shape or color the attempt may be made.” The Democrats warned that war would result if their calls were not heeded.

The Democrats of this era were more inclusive when it came to the European immigrants. Their 1856 platform opposed secret political societies “claiming to be exclusively American.” They expressed strong opposition anti-Catholic bias in law. They also took a strongly pro-Westward expansion position which in some ways contradicted their demand for a small central government. Territorial expansion was matched with a demand for a canal in Central America (the location wasn’t mentioned in 1856, but several subsequent platforms focused on Nicaragua).

1860-1872. The Civil War divided the Democrats and the succession of the Southern states in the aftermath of the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860 weakened their electoral coalition. Their platforms in 1860 and 1864 were short (372 and 506 words, respectively) and largely muted on issues of race, immigration and national identity. In 1860, the Democrats put the question of slavery in the hands of the Supreme Court (in the aftermath of the Court’s 1857 ruling in *Dred Scott v. Sandford*) and opposed state legislative efforts to block the enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Act; by 1864 they expressed concerns about civil liberties violations that

targeted Southern sympathizers. Beginning in 1868, the Democrats addressed White racial grievance in terms of states' rights and the overreach of the federal government, a theme that would reappear in various forms for the remainder of the Century.

Despite its brevity, the 1860 Democratic Party platform did introduce two new issues related to race, national identity, and immigration that would recur throughout the Century and, in one case, be echoed by the Republicans. The Democrats called for the acquisition of Cuba. They also called for the protection of U.S. citizens – native-born or naturalized – at home and abroad (challenging the laws of European powers, particularly Britain, that refused to recognize the loss of nationality among their emigres who had naturalized as U.S. citizens). This latter plank was repeated many times and also appeared in the Republican Party platforms beginning in 1860 (as well as in the platform of the splinter Breckinridge faction of the Democratic Party in 1860).

In the two party platforms after the end of the Civil War, the Democrats amplified their defense of states' rights and the rights of White residents of the Southern states. They opposed the Freedman's Bureau in the 1868 platform and its efforts to "secure Negro supremacy." They demanded that states be restored to the Union with full rights; most important among these was the power to regulate voting. By 1872, they tempered their language a bit and indicated that they didn't want to reopen the debate over the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments, but spoke of the responsibility of the federal government to ensure equality before the law and "equal and exact justice to all regardless of race." The 1872 platform also called for the removal of all disabilities based on the rebellion.

1876-1900. The end of Reconstruction was presaged in the 1876 Democratic Party platform which set the tone for the next six party platforms. White racial grievance characterized the discussion of race in the South. A new enemy also began to appear, initially with "the incursions of another race" on the Pacific coast that would grow to a more expansive demand

for exclusion of some immigrants (that remained in 1900 more narrow than the exclusion called for in Republican Party platforms).

By 1876, the Democrats returned to their pre-War focus on federalism and states' rights. The "corrupt centralism" that they condemned was certainly more focused on race in 1876 and after than it had been before the War. The centralism ensured "carpet-bag tyrannies." Democrats also warned of efforts to force integration in the schools. By 1880, the federal infamy extended to voter intimidation at the hands of federal marshals. Some form of this concern about federal violations of state regulation of voting remained in the next several Party platforms.

Immigration and colonial expansion also began to shape Democratic Party platforms in this era. The 1876 concern about "incursions of another race" was a generalized condemnation of U.S. policy. In 1880, the Democrats began to make specific proposals – amending the Burlingame Treaty to allow for legislation to prohibit Chinese immigration (1880), expulsion of Chinese laborers (1888), and a claim in the 1892 platform that would resonate with Mr. Trump today that the United States was a "dumping ground for known criminals" that laid the foundation for an 1896 proposal to exclude paupers." The Democrats, however, were somewhat tempered relative to the Republicans of this era (discussed below). Their 1892 platform opposed efforts to further restrict immigration and they advocated home rule for the new colonies that the United States acquired in this period, specifically Puerto Rico. They also opposed sumptuary laws – early Prohibition proposals – which would have limited the behaviors of many of that era's immigrants and were understood as a form of social control of immigrants and poor people. Democratic Party platforms also spoke to specific concerns of some the era's immigrants – home rule for Ireland and opposition to the persecution of Russian Jewish and Lutheran populations.

One final set of issues relating to national identity appeared late in this period and served to distinguish Democrats from Republicans. The imperial ambitions of the nation and

the territories/colonies that resulted presented a critical turning point in the nation's history. With the conclusion of the Spanish-American War, the nation had territories not clearly on a path to statehood. Although there was an early commitment to Cuban independence, the disposition of Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and Guam was unclear. National policy was to maintain these territories as territories and to create a legal structure for this. The Democrats followed what had been the traditional policy and demanded in the 1900 Party platform that the Constitution follow the flag and the United States not be "Half Republic, half empire." In both 1896 and 1900, Democratic platforms expressed sympathy for the people of Puerto Rico and, by 1900, for home rule, which could be read as an early call for a path to statehood. While there was no similar plank supporting Philippine home rule, Democrats did condemn President McKinley's Philippine policy in the 1900 platform.

Whigs

The demise of the Whigs as an organized political party after the 1856 election was presaged to some degree by their four Party platforms. They tended to be shorter than Democratic Party platforms of this era and offered (even) fewer specifics. The rhetoric tended toward high principles. Race, national identity, and immigration are absent from the 1844 Whig Party Platform. In 1848, the Whigs ground their party and their Presidential candidate (Zachary Taylor) in the "broad and firm platform of the Constitution, braced up by all its inviolable and sacred guarantees and compromises, and cherished in the affections because protective of the interests of the people." The compromises balanced with the Constitution's sacred guarantees could be read as speaking to the challenges the nation (and the party) were facing over slavery or simply the necessities of governance.

The two Whig Party platforms of the 1850s offered slightly more, but not much. The 1852 platform offered support for the Fugitive Slave Act and its enforcement "until it's no longer

needed.” The 1856 Whig platform called for Union and indicated that the Party was not a geographical party. After that election, however, it was no longer a party.

Republicans

Republican Party platforms between 1856 and 1900 offer less of a foundation for periodizing in terms of platform language on race. The first two (1856 and 1860) are certainly animated by opposition to slavery. With the outbreak of the War, however, the focus on race remains relatively consistent for the remainder of the Century, if steadily less important in the overall balance of issues raised. As with the Democratic Party platforms of this era, the Republicans move from support for immigration and immigrants to selective opposition. As I have suggested, the Republicans selective opposition is broader and more exclusionary than the Democrats. On the question of the meanings of national identity, the parties end the period under study with very different views.

The 1856 and 1860 Republican Party platforms offer a direct challenge to the expansion of slavery in the United States. The 1856 platform calls for the admission of Kansas as a free state and the prohibition of slavery from territories, a plank repeated and strengthened in the 1860 Republican Party platform. The 1860 Republican Party platform also changed that the slave trade was re-opening.

The 1860 Republican platform also introduced the Party’s initial position on immigrants, if not immigration. Like the Democrats in 1860, the Republicans called for the protection of U.S. citizens – regardless of the source of their citizenship – at home and abroad. The Republican Party Platform also identified two specific immigrant rights as worth preserving: naturalization law should remain unchanged (also a response to the Know Nothings) and immigrants should continue to have access to public lands.

The Republican condemnation of slavery amplifies in the Party platforms beginning in 1864 and continues at least through 1888. In 1864, the Republicans also introduce a second

theme that repeats in each platform through 1900 (and likely beyond) – ensuring rights for the freed slaves and praise for wartime and Reconstruction policies to ensure equality. On the first point, the Republicans are clear:

“slavery was the cause, and now constitutes the strength of this Rebellion, and as it must be, always and everywhere, hostile to the principles of Republican Government, justice and the National safety demand its utter and complete extirpation from the soil of the Republic; and that, while we uphold and maintain the acts and proclamations by which the Government, in its own defense, has aimed a deathblow at this gigantic evil, we are in favor, furthermore, of such an amendment to the Constitution, to be made by the people in conformity with its provisions, as shall terminate and forever prohibit the existence of Slavery within the limits of the jurisdiction of the United States” (Article 3 of the 1864 Republican Party Convention).

The 1864 Republican Party platform speaks to a specific rights for African Americans, or at least for African Americans in the military – full protection of the laws. This recognition of African American rights is a first in U.S. party platforms. The 1864 Republican platform also indicates that “foreign immigration, which in the past has added so much to the wealth, development of resources and increase of power to the nation, the asylum of the oppressed of all nations, should be fostered and encouraged by a liberal and just policy” (language repeated in 1868).

The 1868, 1872, and 1876 Republican Party platforms each speak to the expansion of specific rights for African Americans – the 14th Amendment and equal suffrage in 1868, support for the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments and a prohibition on discrimination in 1872, and a more general protection of rights in the context of a “pacification” of the “Southern section” in 1876. Reflecting the decline of Radical Reconstruction as a force within the Republican leadership, these provisions become less prominent and less explicit over this period.

Beginning in 1876, the Republicans move away from their support of immigration. As with the Democrats, the initial target is the Chinese. The Republican platform calls for an investigation of the cost of “Mongolian immigration.” They also call for guarantees that “American institutions” will be protected in the territories. Reflecting concerns about Mormonism in the Utah territory, this language expands in several subsequent platforms to include other

customs in other territories. The 1876 Republicans also oppose the expenditure of public monies for sectarian schools, which is targeted more at U.S. Catholics. This concern continues in subsequent platforms and takes various forms.

The Compromise of 1877 ensured the end of military Reconstruction, but the Republicans use their 1880 platform to claim victory: "The Republican Party ... transformed 4,000,000 human beings from the likeness of things to the rank of citizens. It relieved Congress from the infamous work of hunting fugitive slaves, and charged it to see that slavery does not exist." With the removal of federal troops from the South, the nation was not in a position to impose national law in the Southern states, but the 1880 platform speaks to the importance of nation over federalism. Platforms for the rest of the Century speak of Southern restrictions on voting and the need for all to have access to the ballot box (to have "one" vote in the 1896 Republican platform).

The 1880 Republican Party platform expands considerably Republican discussions of immigration and immigrants. Protections for naturalized citizens remain, but Republicans expand the call for restrictions on secular schools. Specifically, the call for a constitutional amendment to prohibit state funds for secular schools. They also advocate the use of treaties to restrict immigration (echoing the Democrats). By 1888, these religious concerns shape Republican calls for territorial statehood. Statehood should only be granted when ecclesiastical power in the territories is excluded from political power.

Republican concerns about immigration and immigrants expand in 1884 and 1888 with the call for a prohibition on all immigrant contract labor. In this call, they link this form of immigration – in which the immigrant's transportation is paid by a third party in exchange for a commitment to work off the debt – to slavery. In 1892, Republicans expand the targets of restriction to "criminals and paupers." In 1896, the illiterate are added and in 1900 "cheap labor" joins the list. Beginning in 1888, Republican platforms call for "temperance and morality." The specific language changes, but these early moves toward prohibition appear in each of the next

three Republican Party platforms. Republican concerns about religious education also reappear, though the focus may be more on Mormons than on Catholics as these concerns appear in the discussion of territorial statehood. The Republicans' 1892 platform opposes any union of church and state. Like the Democrats, the Republicans use their platforms in this era to play ethnic politics – supporting home rule in Ireland, condemning the persecution of the Jews in Russia, and condemning the massacres in Armenia.

Just as for the Democrats in the last decade of the 19th Century, the Republicans face the question of imperial expansion. This starts modestly, as it did for the Democrats, with a call for a canal across Central America, initially in Nicaragua and later in an unspecified location. The Republicans, however, move quickly to a more imperial vision of the United States. In 1896, they call for the annexation of the Hawaiian Islands, with no mention of a path to statehood (they had previously advocated home rule for Alaska which had previously been a first step toward statehood). The 1900 Republican platform calls for enforcement of the Treaty of Paris and recognizes the new responsibilities that the U.S. has to maintain law and order and establish good government in the new territories (not named). It does call for Cuban independence, but does not indicate a path to statehood or independence for Puerto Rico, the Philippines, or Guam.

One new racial issue appears at the end of the 19th Century. The 1896 Republican Party platform includes a plank opposing lynching in no uncertain terms: "We proclaim our unqualified condemnation of the uncivilized and preposterous [barbarous] practice well known as lynching, and the killing of human beings suspected or charged with crime without process of law." The federal government, under Republican leadership, however does not chose to exercise powers it has to enforce opposition to this outrage. Republicans perhaps realize this even though they might not admit it. In the 1900 platform, Republicans indicate that the 15th Amendment must be protected.

Other Parties

The other 19th Century political parties (that received electoral college votes) spoke to the specific issues of the day that spurred the creation of the parties. One of these, the Breckinridge Faction of the 1860 Democratic Party engaged racial issues. The other two did not. While this may not have been a particular surprise for the Constitutional Union Party (1860) which had the single plank of maintaining the Constitution and the union of the state at all costs, it was perhaps more so for the Populists in 1892. They were silent on immigration issues which were heating up in national politics.

The Breckinridge Faction of the 1860 Democratic Party amended and supplemented the rather brief 1860 Democratic Party platform to protect the rights of slaveholders and slave states. The former were accorded the right to settle with their property in any territory and the latter were offered statehood without regard to support or opposition to slavery. Each of these planks were further than the national Democrats in 1860. The Breckinridge Faction of the 1860 Democratic Party echoed Democratic Party platform demands for acquiring Cuba, enforcing the Fugitive Slave Act, and protecting citizens – native-born or naturalized – at home and abroad.

Conclusions: Race, National Identity, and Immigration in Party Discourse

The period under study saw the rise of the mass political party in the United States, the high point of mass (male) participation in U.S. elections, and the beginning of the decline of party conventions as deliberative bodies in American politics (Reynolds 2006). This continuous growth, at least until late in the Century, required the rapid mobilization of new partisans. These new partisans included many natives or the children of natives who had previously been denied the franchise by requirements that voters be land holders, but also many new immigrants who naturalized as U.S. citizens and their children. Considering this audience, questions of race, national identity, and immigration were never far from the minds of party leaders. The party

platforms of this era certainly reflect their efforts to frame the party agendas around these issues and to build the mass base of the parties and to distinguish the parties from each other.

The rhetoric of the two major parties on race certainly remained divided throughout the period under study. Although Republican concerns about the treatment of African Americans increasingly rang hollow, they maintained platform language supporting African American rights through the end of the 19th Century (and beyond). This was certainly paired with language that “waived the bloody shirt” (in part blaming the Democrats for the War), but the pro-civil rights platform language remained longer and, by volume, louder.

On national identity, the parties differed increasingly over the period of study. Initially, the disagreement took the form of a debate on the role and importance of religious freedom in American identity, with the Democrats taking a more expansive view. These differences grew over the decades as Republicans became increasingly animated by concerns over state support of religion, tolerance of religious difference, and personal morality (particularly a willingness to limit access to alcohol). By the end of the Century, the parties divided on the question of whether the Constitution followed the flag with the Democrats seemingly maintaining the traditional view and seeking to ensure opportunities for “home rule” in the new territories/colonies.

In terms of immigration, the parties followed a similar path from welcoming immigrants to selectively excluding some potential immigrants. The transition in party rhetoric accompanied a changed national understanding of the power of government to restrict immigration. By the end of the period under study, the Republican list of potentially excluded immigrants was more extensive than the Democrat’s list, but both seem to be on a path to the significant restrictions on immigration enacted by Congress in 1917, 1921, and 1924. Both parties also used their platforms as a canvas for symbolic ethnic politics by identifying affinity with the cause of American ethnics co-nationals abroad. On this, both parties played ethnic politics with equal attentiveness.

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Table One. Party Platform, Word Count, 1840-1900

	<i>Democrats</i>	<i>Republicans</i>	<i>Other</i>
1840	536		
1844	938		357 (Whig)
1848	1,865		784 (Whig)
1852	1,367		650 (Whig)
1856	2,433	952	566 (Whig)
1860	372	1,194	363 (Democrats – Breckinridge Faction) 211 (Constitutional Union)
1864	506	895	
1868	1,422	924	
1872	633	1,270	
1876	1,867	1,363	
1880	692	1,466	
1884	2,695	1,538	
1888	1,379	2,391	
1892	2,510	1,342	1,488 (Populist)
1896	1,929	1,933	
1900	2,580	2,299	

Note: Other includes parties other than the Democrats and Republicans that issued a party platform and won electoral college votes in the general election.

Source: Author's calculations based on Peters and Wooley (2016).