

THURMOND IMAGE SEEN AS CHANGING

NYT
Moderate Actions and Tone
Get Mixed Local Reaction

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COLUMBIA, S.C., Oct. 16 —

The development of what some see as a new image for Senator Strom Thurmond is attracting widespread interest and causing mixed reactions among Negroes in South Carolina.

The apparent change occurred after the victory last year by John C. West, a Democrat, over Albert W. Watson, a Republican and Mr. Thurmond's hand-picked candidate for Governor, whose campaign was called "racist" even by some Republicans. Negroes now make up almost 25 per cent of the registered voters in South Carolina and their solid support of Mr. West was decisive.

Early this year, Harry S. Dent, a White House political aide, discussed plans in an interview with a South Carolina newspaper to build a new image for Senator Thurmond, Mr. Dent's former boss. "We're going to get him on the high ground of fairness on the race question," Mr. Dent said.

Moderate Statements

Since then, the Republican Senator has done the following things:

¶Hired Thomas Moss, a black political organizer who directed Negro voter registration efforts for the South Carolina Voter Education Project, for his staff in South Carolina, and a black secretary for his Washington office.

¶Announced Federal grants for projects in black areas, including at least one occasion when he addressed a predominantly black audience to announce a rural water project and remained afterwards to shake hands.

¶Issued moderate statements on racial questions.

In a statement to Ebony magazine that aides say Senator Thurmond wrote himself, he said: "In most instances I am confident that we have more in common as Southerners than we have reason to oppose each other because of race. Equality of opportunity for all is a goal upon which blacks and Southern whites can agree."

This contrasted with a 1948 keynote speech he made as Governor to a conference in Jackson, Miss., of "all true white Jeffersonian Democrats," which later nominated him for President as the "Dixiecrat" candidate. Mr. Thurmond had declared: "All the laws of Washington, and all the bayonets of the Army, cannot force the Negroes into their [Southerners' homes, their schools, their churches and their places of recreation and amusement."

'A Few Gestures'

Blacks disagree on whether Senator Thurmond's efforts can be converted into black votes, but a veteran civil rights activist, Mrs. Modjeska Simkins of Columbia, said: "People are not as rabidly opposed to him as they once were."

Isaac Williams, field secretary for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in South Carolina, said that the Senator "cannot erase his image with a few gestures. Most black voters would be content to bring Mr. Thurmond home to rest."

But Charles Ross, the black Mayor of Lincolnville, a biracial community near Charleston, says Senator Thurmond actively helped his town secure a \$13,000 grant for a day care center two months ago and helped get assurances of \$320,000 for a water project.

"If he keeps on producing, he is due some consideration," Mr. Ross said.

Mrs. Victoria DeLee of Dorchester County, another civil rights activist, who ran unsuccessfully for Congress as a United Citizens party candidate in a special election last spring, observed: "It's not what a man was yesterday, but what he is today. What he's doing is getting next to the people."

Consistency Asserted

In an interview this week with The Charlotte Observer, Senator Thurmond denied that he had changed at all and said the defeat of Mr. Watson "had nothing to do" with his actions.

"I've always favored equal employment and equal educational opportunities," he said. "I don't know any change I've made except to employ two blacks among the staff. I've been constant through the years."

He said he opposed civil rights bills because "I didn't think they were constitutional then and don't now."

"I've worked around black people all my life," Senator Thurmond said, "and get along real well with them. I don't think anybody living can say I've ever done anything to try to hurt any black person. It's not the color of people that count but the manners of people that really counts."

"It kind of hurts me when anyone portrays me as being biased or prejudiced, because I'm not."

He emphasized that South Carolina was getting more Federal money than ever before and that "a lot of it is going to black people."

"Black people are benefiting more under the Nixon Administration and because of my connections with the Nixon Administration than from anything ever done for them," he said. "And I'm glad to help them."