August 29, 2008

BILL MOYERS: Welcome to the JOURNAL. We'll be talking about the political news of the week: John McCain's choice for vice president, Sarah Palin, governor of Alaska.

SARAH PALIN: Thank you so much.

BILL MOYERS: And the choice of Barack Obama as the first African American presidential nominee of a major party in our history.

In Denver, it was a week of high drama. A party and a pageant. A gathering of the tribes and a religious revival.

CONVENTION SPEAKER: Great and awesome god. As we...

BILL MOYERS: It was a stunning showcase for the stars and a theater of politics.

HILLARY CLINTON: I move Senator Barack Obama of Illinois be selected by this convention, by acclamation, as the nominee of the Democratic Party for President of the United States.

BARACK OBAMA: Thanks everybody.

BILL MOYERS: But above all, this was a moment in history.

BARACK OBAMA: I accept your nomination for Presidency of the United States.

BILL MOYERS: Born, the passions and struggles of America's past.

Just 60 years ago this summer - in the lifetime of many of us - the liberal young mayor of Minneapolis, Hubert Humphrey, courageously called on an ambivalent Democratic National Convention meeting in Philadelphia to stand up for civil rights.

HUBERT HUMPHREY: For those who say we are rushing this issue of civil rights, I say to them: We are one hundred and seventy-two years late. The time has arrived in America for the Democratic Party to get out of the shadows of states' rights and to walk forthrightly into the bright sunshine of human rights.

BILL MOYERS: America was a racist country in 1948, and when the convention rose to Humphrey's challenge to pass a strong civil rights platform, the rabble-rousing Strom Thurmond of South Carolina led rebellious southern delegates in a walkout to form the Dixiecrat Party behind a platform calling for "the segregation of the races and the racial integrity of each race."

Now, 60 summers later and 45 years to the day that Martin Luther King dreamed of a land where children would "not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character," the Democratic Party has nominated an African American of mixed descent as its candidate for President.
BARACK OBAMA: And God Bless the United States of America.

BILL MOYERS: A moment in history, indeed.

With me now are some keen observers of politics and culture, Adolph Reed and Katrina vanden Heuvel.

Adolph Reed teaches political science at the University of Pennsylvania and is one of our country's most perceptive social critics. He writes widely on subjects ranging from A to Z and in his books has taken on the likes of Jesse Jackson and Louis Farrakhan.

Katrina is the editor and publisher of the liberal magazine THE NATION. She's also the editor of this book, A JUST RESPONSE: THE NATION ON TERRORISM, DEMOCRACY, AND SEPTEMBER 11TH, 2001.

She co-authored this cover story on the eve of the Democratic Convention. It begins: "Electric. When Barack Obama receives the Democratic Presidential nomination... new possibilities will be born."

A historic candidacy, a new generation in motion, a nation yearning for change. Even the cynics," she says, "running for the McCain campaign might be touched...."

BILL MOYERS: It's good to see both of you.

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: Thank you.

ADOLPH REED JR.: Thank you.

BILL MOYERS: But how about, for electricity, the announcement today of Sarah Palin, governor of Alaska, as John McCain's running mate? What do you make of that?

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: Brilliant, clever, and cynical.

BILL MOYERS: How so?

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: It's a new kind of Republican grievance resentment politics. Large - I mean, so much of it is about feeding into the resentment about Hillary Clinton not getting one, the nomination of the Democratic Party, two, the vice-presidential nod. I think it's a moment though when we need to keep our eyes on the issues, and on the issues, Sarah Palin has a great life story, like John McCain.

She makes some history in her own right. But she's in lock step with John McCain on the big issues of our time. Whether - I mean, she's a ferocious anti-choice woman, lifetime member of the NRA. And if women seek a better, more just America, more decent jobs, health care, education, a court that isn't going to roll back rights, Sarah Palin is not someone you'd consider. But it is focus tested to the nth degree.

BILL MOYERS: Here's my conspiratorial theory that you know, the right wing has been pressing, John McCain to make a one-term pledge. People are concerned about his age, concerned about his health. So he said he's not going to do that. But he's been a little soft on that promise lately, and what if right before the election, he announces to the country, in one of the debates, that, "Sarah, that I'm gonna make that pledge of just one term," setting up the possibility of the first woman president being not Hillary Clinton but a conservative Republican. Do those kind of thoughts go through your head?

ADOLPH REED JR: It's an interesting thought. I was as sandbagged by this announcement as anybody else was. I don't think I've ever heard the woman's name. And then when I heard that her husband is an oil worker and probably comes out of the old oil, chemical and atomic workers, which is one of the founding unions that put so much into the labor party. And this guy's wife is now, you know, the Republican vice-presidential candidate seems like another kind of expression of oddness of American politics.

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: But I do think it exacerbates the concern about McCain's age. I don't love going in that direction, but it needs to be used in talking about Karl Rove and brass knuckle politics. It undercuts the experience. What happened to their concern about experience? And these debate-
BILL MOYERS: It makes it hard for them to say Barack Obama.

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: -has no ex - yeah. And then when you go into these debates, and let's not forget that it's rare that vice-presidents really, you know, look Bush and Dan Quayle. I mean, Dan Quayle should have discredited Bush from politics forever. But that debate on national security, I think, could very well hurt Sarah Palin. And I also think if Frank Rich, as Frank Rich wrote, if economic anxiety is the new terrorism of our time, she doesn't have answers other than, you know, John, she's in lock step with John McCain on the economic issues that need to be dealt with in a very different way. I mean, this is the old order has broken down. People are in pain in this country. And she's just offering the bromides.

BILL MOYERS: Do you think that it's conceivable that she could attract the concerned women, concerned that Hillary didn't get the nomination, in enough numbers to impact on the race?

ADOLPH REED JR: Well, I think it's possible. I mean in reflecting on it, I thought that it could be a little bit like the sort of inverse of the Carol Moseley Braun effect, in 1992, when-

BILL MOYERS: She was an African American candidate for the Senate.

ADOLPH REED JR: Right. And what happened was, you know, or were in Illinois at that time was anyway that there was a rotten deal that the incumbent, Alan Dixon, had cut with the Republicans that in exchange for his voting for and supporting Clarence Thomas, they'd promise him weak opposition. The wildcard in that race was a self-made gazillionaire who ran a self-financed campaign for the Democratic primary. The vote was split three ways.

And Carol actually won the Democratic nomination with less than 40 percent of the vote. But when she faced the Republican non-entity from Kenilworth in the general election there's a substantial crossover of normally Republican-voting suburban white women who voted for her as part of the year of the woman, or the reaction against Thomas. And the fleeting sentiment, in favor of Anita Hill. And it could be, you know, that she could make some sort of dent among marginally Democratic-voting women who are-

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: Going to put pressure on Hillary Clinton.

BILL MOYERS: How so?

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: Well, I mean, I think, you know, she gave the speech at the convention, which I thought was very deft and really said, you know, "Obama's cause is our case." Some people thought she didn't do enough to set Obama up as the person you had to vote for. But she's going to have to get out there and speak to these women, these 18 million cracks in the ceiling which she brought into a process.

I was also struck just watching right now Palin, how white that crowd was. And I think women are part of a new, you know, a progressive coalition in this country, multiracial coalition. There are tectonic shifts in this country. And it's unclear that you put a woman like this on the ticket as vice-president, that John McCain can overcome a party that is still a party of white America. And this convention coming up doesn't look like it's going to be any different.

BILL MOYERS: Go back to this convention. I mean, McCain did upstage, somewhat-

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: Yeah.

BILL MOYERS: this Democratic week, Obama's moment. But it wasn't the Democrats' week. You wrote last week, as I quoted at the beginning, that this would be an electric moment, when Obama was accepted the nomination. Was it, for you?

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: It was electric in the sense of the history, a sense of who Obama is standing on the shoulders of those who have mobilized and moved this country. The great civilizing advances of our time have come from the social movements, the women's movement, civil rights movement, the labor movement. So that was exciting.

And I think that it opened up in what he spoke to. The energy from below that can push him to fulfill some of what he spoke about, because he did lay out a populist speech. But
he didn't speak to the central issue, it seemed to me, which is the role of government. He danced around it, even though he did speak in sharp, populist terms. Country is open to a stronger government role, if he doesn't feel yet, the pressure that has to come from people in pain from below, to speak to that as clearly as he might.

BILL MOYERS: On the other hand, you grew up in a time when the historic affiliation between the Democratic Party and the Ku Klux Klan was still in the consciousness-

ADOLPH REED JR: Right.

BILL MOYERS: -of African Americans down there. And although you've been somewhat skeptical about Obama from the beginning, because you didn't think he was maybe progressive enough, you must take some moment of pride in the fact that a party that once embraced the Ku Klux Klan has in fact nominated and is going to run the first African American for president.

ADOLPH REED JR: Well, I'll put it to you like this Bill. I think the Democratic Party embraced the Klan, or vice-versa, in the aftermath of the Civil War, for strategic reasons, right, as an instrument of establishing a social order in the aftermath of slavery that depended on enforcement of a certain kind of racial hierarchy. That moment has passed.

So the Democratic Party's been a different kind of animal for a long time. I actually had been more inclined to compare Obama's place in the Democratic Party and what he stands for to the emergence of Booker T. Washington-

BILL MOYERS: Booker T. Washington, the man who said, "Let's collaborate." The Southern-

ADOLPH REED JR: Yeah.

BILL MOYERS: -black who said, "Let's collaborate with the white power structure and we'll make more progress that way than we would if we go off into the streets, right?"

ADOLPH REED JR: Right. Right.

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: I'm more interested, Bill, and this is what moved me last night in the moment, in the potential of the moment. Not necessarily the man Obama, though, you know, it is a moment of history to savor, and change doesn't come easily in our calcified political process. But he has brought energy into a political process.

Millions of people who haven't been part of our process, whether moving or electoral, are now in it. And that energy unleashed, if the progressive community can harness it in ways, can take on entrenched corporate interests, and can push Obama. I mean, that story about Roosevelt. It is a different America. But the story, and everyone has their tale, whether it was Sidney Hillman, the labor leader, or Frances Perkins, the first woman in the cabinet, comes into Roosevelt's and, she goes, "We got to do this. We got to do that. We got to speak out more boldly."

And Roosevelt says, "Go out and make me do it."

ADOLPH REED JR: Yes.

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: And that is a tale-

BILL MOYERS: Give me the constituent-

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: That's right.

BILL MOYERS: That I need-

ADOLPH REED JR: Right.

BILL MOYERS: to do it.

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: And I think it is a moment where you have a Democratic
Party where the Democratic wing of the Democratic Party, and I'm not wedded to the Democrats. They do disappoint. But there are some good people in there to give them the strength of movement pressure from below, because only an alliance with those in the political electoral process, will we have a chance, on the great issues of our time, to really move, move.

BILL MOYERS: Well there is - go ahead-

ADOLPH REED JR: I think that's absolutely correct except I think that where our perceptions may differ here is the capacity that there is to bring that kind of pressure from underneath. You know, I don't see where it's coming from. I mean, there are no dynamic social movements left-of-center American politics now. And-

BILL MOYERS: There isn't a left left. Is there?

ADOLPH REED JR: No-

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: There is a progressive community, and I hate the word. It's resolutely un-sexy, but infrastructure. It is not necessarily popular social movements, the anti-war, peace and justice movement needs to be stronger. But it is there. And they're doing something. I think September 20th, knock on a million doors to end this war.

But here's the thing. In the primaries, with all the limitations, you did have a field of candidates vying to be the most anti-war, most caring for labor, the most green. And I think progressives did drive that debate. It's constricted. There is no question the agenda in our country today, corrosive consensus, and I write about this in the article with Bob Borosage.

No one's speaking about a military budget that's so bloated, or being global cop or possible expansion of occupation of Afghanistan, which to me, would be the end of Obama's hopes and dreams, because you can't invest in rebuilding this country if you do that. And a whole slew of other issues you care so deeply about. But the Democratic Party, the platform, speaks firmly to issues which move me, and I know they do you. Labor. This is a life and death election for labor. This administration, the Bush Administration, has waged a war on labor we haven't seen.

BILL MOYERS: Right. But you mentioned Bob Borosage, a long-time leading progressive thinker. And he's in Denver. He emailed a number of people, saying that, you know, reminding them that Obama has always been a cautious liberal. Now you don't make significant change, do you, with cautious liberals?

ADOLPH REED JR: No, I mean and I take Katrina's point as you know stressing the possibility to push him from the left. But the problem is, is there's got to be, you know, the institutionalized political force that can push him. And in fact, I mean, one of my problems with Obama's persona is that it's built largely around redefining progressivism as the sort of left tail of a rational, neo-liberal politics. This notion that we can make change without conflict, for instance. I mean, I don't, I've got a lot of problems you know, with Geraldine Ferraro.

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: Yeah.

ADOLPH REED JR: But I think she hit the nail on the head, you know, with that one. I mean, that's-

BILL MOYERS: When she said?

ADOLPH REED JR: -that you can't make significant political change without some conflict in it, right?

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: Adolph Reed quoting Geraldine Ferraro.

BILL MOYERS: This is a transformational moment.

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: You have someone else, that's right, you've had someone else from "The Nation" on this program, William Greider.
BILL MOYERS: Yeah.

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: William Greider, who is a chronicler of predatory corporate power in this country. If you look at the facts on the ground, the condition of this country now, it may well be that those drive - force Obama to be bolder, or he will be swallowed up.

ADOLPH REED JR: But-

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: And FDR, I hate to go back to FDR, but I will. But-

BILL MOYERS: It's a different world-

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: -he campaigned-

BILL MOYERS: Right

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: It is a different world. But there is - it's a different world in good ways, too. But he campaigned as a balanced budget moderate. And I do think there is, again, the energy. And I do think there is a capacity that is building. And finally, on the neo-liberal front, we agree that you need to address the structural inequities of our time-

BILL MOYERS: Neo-liberalism, being the view that-

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: But that's been dis-

BILL MOYERS: -the global economy is a good thing and we need to support it.

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: But that's been shattered. I think the events of - so, an old order has died, in my view. You've written, Bill, in our pages about conservatism, intellectually, morally bankrupt. The fight is now on for what the new order will be.

BILL MOYERS: All right, but speaking of that, and the progressives, whoever they are, and how many of them they are having a strong debate today. All day on the blogs, you read them. Some people are saying, "Let's give Obama the chance, in his own right, to win the White House, get to the White House, and then we'll pressure him." And others, I think, with whom you would agree say, "No, look, you've got to pressure Obama now, to be progressive, if he's going to do anything positive when he gets that power." What do you think of that?

ADOLPH REED JR: It's pretty hard for me to wrap my mind around the other position, to tell you the truth. I mean it's, and I've characterized it in a number of different ways in different contexts. I mean, the notion that well, actually, you can go back to the history that we share. I recall when I was a kid in New Orleans, our moderate segregationist mayor, Chep Morrison ran for governor a couple times.

And his appeal to black voters, which, of course, came to count after Smith V. Alright was that, "You know I'm your friend. And you know I really care about you. But when I go up to North Louisiana, I'm gonna have to call you the N word and tell rape stories and I describe you as monkeys. But I just have to do that to get elected, and don't worry, once I get elected, you know, I'll take care of." Well, the question is that if that's what you have to do to get elected, well, then won't that also be what you have to do to govern, right?

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: But we, you know, I agree with Adolph in this sense, that "The Nation" published an open letter to Barack Obama two weeks ago-

ADOLPH REED JR: Right, right.

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: Signed now by more than 25,000 people, and within that is celebrating his candidacy and the energy he has brought in, the grassroots energy. Yet, don't comprise. Though we understand compromise is necessary in a democracy on core issues, because we believe that the grassroots movement, and the base, the much maligned base, will counter the entrenched money interests and the dead weight of political power in this country. And to lose - he won't lose it, because the alternative is too gruesome. But he needs real mobilization, and that comes with real enthusiasm.
BILL MOYERS: But that's mobilization for the election. I mean-

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: That's right.

BILL MOYERS: -not necessarily-

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: But then we-

BILL MOYERS: -mobilization-

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: But then-

BILL MOYERS: -for this position.

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: But then we say that we will be your constructive allies, but we will challenge you on key fronts moving forward.

BILL MOYERS: Here's my take on what happened this week. What Obama offers is a leap over the racial divide, a new mythology for America, if you will. Those stories that we saw-

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: Uh-huh.

BILL MOYERS: -history that we heard this week. And the resurrection of the policies of the Clinton era. What do you think about that?

ADOLPH REED JR: Well, let me say this. This may sound odd, but I don't really believe there's a racial divide in America. Right? I mean, I think that's a fiction of our discourse, right? Most people of all races in this country are concerned about the same things, all of the time. I was part of an organizing effort in South Carolina, where we actually got 16,500 plus signatures of registered voters, mainly working class. Black, white, all sorts around putting the labor party on the ballot. And people were-

BILL MOYERS: A labor party?

ADOLPH REED JR: Yes

ADOLPH REED JR: And there is a South Carolina labor party that exists now. And white workers are saying things to us, "You know, it's about time that somebody stood for something." And we just talked very frankly about you know, concerns like free public higher education and single payer health care. And so forth and so on.

Now, this is in a state, right, where the main political issue that had bubbled up in into national attention was a controversy over the Confederate Flag. Right? And the reverberations of that conflict were still visible. But the point is that if you talk to people in concrete ways about shared concerns, that's where the movement building comes from.

BILL MOYERS: But let me ask you, you come out of the labor movement, so to speak. Do you think Obama can become a working class hero?

ADOLPH REED JR: He could become a working class hero, if he were to take a more coherent position on trade, which he hasn't done. He could become a working class hero if he were to take a step beyond retailing, affecting stories about what working people, whose - their lives are hard, and articulate a programmatic method. I don't mean a wonkish 60 page policy proposal, right?

As I was saying before, I mean, I think, when you know what strikes me about Obama, one thing struck me about his speech is that he's got on one level, large platitudes. And on another level, personal stories. But there's a pragmatic vision which is what would, you know, give some glue that real people who get up and in the morning with problems could connect onto and see-

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: But these-

ADOLPH REED JR: -see themselves in, and it's not there.
KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: These are the constraints of elections. Elections in our-

ADOLPH REED JR: Right.

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: -country do not lead to the most concrete.

ADOLPH REED JR: Right.

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: They do call forth from the best candidates' stories. And though I wish Obama was reading out loud your story about a new story for America, which is so brilliant, which speaks to a different America and speaks to the role of government. But you asked about Clinton. I don't think he is Clinton for two reasons. One, I think Clinton really did want to kind of undermine the progressive coalition. There was a strong Democratic leadership council, conservative strain there. And two, the conditions are different. There is a movement now. There's an understanding of the need for investment in this country. If they could only get rid of this fetish about balancing the budget, at a time which demands a new, public infrastructure rebuilding agenda.

BILL MOYERS: Back to the point you were making earlier. Obama did not mention racial inequality in his speech. And he did not call Martin Luther King by name. When he got - that was - I thought that was a very powerful section of his speech.

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: Uh-huh.

BILL MOYERS: But he talked about, "The preacher said this. The preacher said that." He didn't use Martin Luther King's name. What would be your understanding of it?

ADOLPH REED JR: Well, the preacher thing is just a rhetorical device that, I'm sure, you know, a special kind of respect, and maybe even implies a kind of oneness with the image. The other stuff I'm not really surprised. I wouldn't have expected much other than that from Obama. I mean, his career-

BILL MOYERS: -champion of the black cause, does he? Even, I mean, his cham-

ADOLPH REED JR: No.

BILL MOYERS: -his triumph is the best thing he could have done for-

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: But why is poverty the black cause? I go back to what Adolph said earlier about his organizing in South Carolina. I think Obama is not doing what Adolph wants. But he is speaking to universal issues that would help the African American community. It will require, at this moment of great inequality in our country, a come back. The organizing efforts and there is a group, Half in Ten, to halve poverty in ten years in this country.

The census figures come out. The problem is there, but Obama's speaking against real constraints. You mention Karl Rove. He had to speak about his patriotism, his religion, because of the smears against him. And he's backing away. You know, I mean, he's backing away from being the African American president.

ADOLPH REED JR: Well, but there's also one, you know, one way that Obama did talk about race, and he does often talk about race, and it's doing what Bill Clinton used to do but even more so, right, with beating up on black, poor people, because-

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: Personal responsibility. I think he also speaks about-

ADOLPH REED JR: Well, that-

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: Government's role-

ADOLPH REED JR: But you know, Obama-

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: -there too.
ADOLPH REED JR: -gives the personal responsibility speech.

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: There's a debate there.

ADOLPH REED JR: To those in investment bankers that he talks to. When he gives the, "Don't feed your kids Popeye's Chicken," for breakfast speech, to the hedge fund operator that he picks up the money from, then I'll accept that he's doing something else. But until then-

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: I'm waiting-

ADOLPH REED JR: -there's this-

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: -personal responsibility for everyone-

ADOLPH REED JR: -code, right? It's a clear code.

BILL MOYERS: We have to wrap. But last week, you wrote in "The Nation" that the Obama nomination sets the stage for a sea change election. I want both of you to come back in the middle of the campaign and we will see if in fact, we're in the midst of a sea change election. Katrina vanden Heuvel and Adolph Reed, thank you for joining me.

ADOLPH REED JR: Thank you

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: Thank you.

BILL MOYERS: Watching the convention this week, I was reminded of another historic moment. The second of July 1964. The day my boss, Lyndon Johnson, the President of the United States, signed into law the Civil Rights Act, ending segregation in public facilities.

With Martin Luther King and other movement leaders crowding around him, it was quite a celebration. But, that evening, as I went over to the living quarters of the White House to take the President some official papers, I found him disconsolate.

"What's the matter," I ask, "this was a great day. You should be jubilant." He looked at me morosely and said, in effect, "I think we just handed the south to the Republicans for the rest of my life and yours." And so we had. As you will read in this important new book, "Divided America," LBJ's economic and racial liberalism broke the ties that bound many conservative whites to the Democratic Party.

And with Ronald Reagan's reelection in 1984, the south had become a Republican stronghold. My next guests know this story inside and out. Earl and Merle Black have spent their adult lives immersed in the politics of the south. Writing highly acclaimed books on THE RISE OF SOUTHERN REPUBLICANS and POLITICS AND SOCIETY IN THE SOUTH.

Now they've turned their focus to other parts of the country. This new book, DIVIDED AMERICA, explains how regional divisions throughout the country are tearing us apart. Creating a political climate of intolerance and paralyzing serious debate on the issues.

They're twins, Earl and Merle Black, separated by 15 minutes at birth. Born in Oklahoma, as I was. Raised in east Texas, as I was. They have been immersed in politics, as I have been. Earl teaches political science at Rice University in Houston. Merle teaches political science at Emory University in Atlanta.

BILL MOYERS: Welcome to both of you.

MERLE BLACK: Thank you.

EARL BLACK: Thank you Bill.

BILL MOYERS: I like this book for many reasons. But, most of all, because you just come right out and say that the struggle for power in this country is ferocious. Is it more ferocious today than ever?

MERLE BLACK: I think in some times. It's not as ferocious as it was in the 1860s. We're
not literally at war in the country today. But what we've got now is the most liberal Democratic Party that we've ever had. And also the most conservative Republican Party that we ever had. Back in the old days, when we were growing up, the Democrats really had a conservative wing. It was not a party dominated by a single ideological group.

BILL MOYERS: There were no conservatives at this convention that I could spot. Did you?

MERLE BLACK: That's right.

EARL BLACK: Yeah, I think the conservative Democrats have almost vanished. They're old and the very slow. And they're not being reproduced. So what we have, I think, in both parties now, is a much more ideologically pure party, where ideology and partisanship reinforce each other.

That makes for a very ferocious politics. And, even more so, because we find that the two political parties, right now, in the last two presidential elections have really two reasonable strongholds each. For the Republicans it's the south and the mountain plains.

For the Democrats, it's the northeast and the Pacific coast. The Midwest is the swing region. But the upper Midwestern states are generally Democratic. Republicans had more success in the lower Midwest. So what we have are two parties that are fighting to get past 270 electoral votes every four years. And the Republicans only barely did it in 2004 and 2000. And that means that the regional divisions become the starting point, I think, for the parties in 2008.

BILL MOYERS: In the context of this regional divide, and in the context of the ferocity of politics as you write about, why the choice of Governor Palin of Alaska? I mean, you don't think of Alaska as part of these five regional areas that you-

EARL BLACK: I think most - the parties and the conventions are trying to do two things. They're trying to, first, unify the party. And then they're trying to get a bump out of it to get a head start for the fall campaign.

So, for John McCain to pick an unknown, Governor Sarah Palin, there's very few Americans know of her existence until this morning here, I think speaks to his effort to try to unify the Republicans. Particularly the socially conservative Republicans. As the Republicans then proceed to go into the fall-

MERLE BLACK: Yeah because John McCain in some ways is a different type of Republican. He's been conspicuously different from George Bush on a number of issues during his presidency here. He's not the typical type of Republican.

So, in some ways, picking someone who's more conventionally conservative on the abortion issue and life issue, but also energy. She's a very strong advocate for drilling. Energy has become much more important issue in the country today. So I think, and also she's from the west.

BILL MOYERS: Do you think it makes McCain more competitive in this race to pick an unknown from a small state with only three electoral votes?

MERLE BLACK: This is a very risky strategy. I think it's a plus for him if she can campaign well. We don't know that. She may be really good on the campaign trail. She may be really bad. That's all to be determined as we go forward.

She has, obviously, no national security experience in this context, too. But, in terms of the south and the mountain plains, she's a very good choice because she will get a huge support, not only from evangelical Christians for whom life is a big, big issue. But also, I think, a lot of other Republicans too, for her, you know, emphasis on this energy issue.

BILL MOYERS: Someone said, this morning, that Alaska is the northern most southern state. Because his values correspond more closely to those below the Mason Dixon Line. I mean, does that make sense to you?

EARL BLACK: Well, I - it's very different, demographically. Basically, no African American in Alaska, so it's very unlike the southern states in that regard. But it's a land where rugged individualism is probably a requisite if you're going to spend your entire life in a climate like Alaska's. You know, you have to-
MERLE BLACK: And maybe more libertarian too. It's not-

BILL MOYERS: Less government intervention.

MERLE BLACK: Much less emphasis on religion than-

BILL MOYERS: Speaking of the south, you arrived today just as I was reading the new Winthrop poll taken among southern voters. It was astonishing. Among southern voters, McCain is leading Obama, generally, by 16 points. And, in the deep south, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana and South Carolina, he’s preferred by 25 point margin. I mean, should Obama write off the south?

EARL BLACK: Well, I think Obama's going to focus on a few southern states where his chances might be better.

BILL MOYERS: Such as?

EARL BLACK: Florida. Virginia. North Carolina. And I think Georgia has been mentioned as one state where the party balance may not be as strongly Republican as it would be in some of the other states. Now, what the south is important, especially for the Republicans. Because, for the Republicans to win a presidential election, they need to do what they've been doing, which is to carry all 11 southern states, and get a sweep of it. For the Democrats, that's out of the question. No Democrat has done that.

Not even Jimmy Carter. I think he took one - ten of 11 here. But if the Democrats can pick off one or two southern states, then it makes their job of getting past 270 electoral votes so much better. So Obama would not want to write off the south. He'd want to target individual states.

MERLE BLACK: You know, what's really interesting here is the Democrats approach the south today, Clinton did this, and Obama's doing this now, and Al Gore tried to do this too, just like Eisenhower did in '52. They're not trying to sweep the region. They're just trying to deny the other party this huge block of electoral votes uncontested.

BILL MOYERS: So what does that do to your strategy? To your combat, as you call it.

MERLE BLACK: Well, it means fierce combat in a small number of southern states, for example. Virginia. Where these changes in northern Virginia have really made the Democrats competitive in that state in a way in which they haven't been in about half a century. In Georgia, Georgia's probably the only deep south state where Obama has a possibility of a campaign.

BILL MOYERS: Because?

MERLE BLACK: Because you have a lot of migration into the Atlanta metro area from northerners, and people other parts of the country. You have a kind of a large black population that is concentrated in the Atlanta metro area. Much easier to organize. So you have the potential of a large organized African American vote in Georgia. Plus kind of northern migration. I think the native-

BILL MOYERS: Percentage of liberal white voters, right?

MERLE BLACK: Yeah, some liberal white voters who will go this way. You also have Bob Barr, the libertarian candidate, who might peel away a few votes.

BILL MOYERS: From Georgia, right?

MERLE BLACK: Yeah, but that big thing, going back to what you said before about the deep south, the deep south was enormously polarized four years ago. You know, go back to Kerry. John Kerry. Here's a white liberal. Kerry got about 14 or 15 percent in Mississippi of the white vote. You know, so Mississippi, Alabama, South Carolina, Georgia, these are votes that are very, very racially polarized when the candidate is not an African American. And now you’ve got an African American candidate-
You know, it's hard for the Democrats to elect liberal whites, especially in southern states. So it should be a bit harder for them to elect a liberal African American candidate. That's the situation that Obama finds himself in, I think, in most of the southern states-

BILL MOYERS: Is there anything that a black Democrat, with a mixed racial heritage, can say to traditional white southern voters that might cause them to want to see him in the White House?

EARL BLACK: I think it's going to be very difficult to get much more than the vote that liberal Democrats have gotten in the past running for the presidency. The key thing about the south, I think, is, especially for the Republican side, what we have that we didn't have, when we were all growing up, is a very large middle class.

And it's a college educated middle class that doesn't see the Democratic party as it did 50 years ago as its natural political home. And that means, if there are all kinds of issues, especially involving taxation that play into the rise of the Republican party in the south.

And make it, I think, very difficult for liberal Democrats, particularly from northeastern states, like Kerry, or from Illinois. A candidate from Chicago, you know, the political culture is so different that it's - I wouldn't underestimate the difficulty of Obama's task.

BILL MOYERS: McCain also has a 34 point margin among white working class southerners. Some of the people you were just talking about. I mean, these are people who have been hurting economically under the Bush administration. Why are they so strongly for McCain?

MERLE BLACK: Well, one of those things that I learned, as part of my education, was working during my college. And you know, in east Texas. And we got paid every two weeks. And there's a lot of cussing going on every two weeks. This is the first group of white workers in the south who had money taken out, you know-

BILL MOYERS: Withholding.

MERLE BLACK: Withholding taxes, etcetera. Previous generation, you're working on the farm, you're just paid in cash. There's nothing like that. Now there's suddenly withholding. That is the issue of taxes. I don't remember what the-

BILL MOYERS: Goes back a long way, right?

MERLE BLACK: Goes back a long way. No, no, I think this is sometimes underestimated in terms of the - they were seeing the Democratic party as a party of taxation program but also a party of taxation. And these workers had a lot of other things they wanted to do with that money that was then now being taken by the federal government.

They disagree with some of the programs. But they also, you know, they also felt it in terms of the pocketbook. These are not fat cats. These are, you know, this is working class that you're talking about. And then when you add to that this cultural conservative out of the church--

BILL MOYERS: Cultural being of the religion.

MERLE BLACK: You know, on the religion, on abortion, on all these other kinds of questions, you know, that too, then the Democrats appear to some of these as too secular-

If blue collar white southerners think their culture's being disrespected, then it's - I think it's very hard to reverse that. And it's very hard for them to see that the Democratic Party would provide them with programs that would make up for the taxes that they are clearly paying these days that they didn't, you know, 50 years ago.

BILL MOYERS: So help me understand this, McCain, according to this latest poll, leads Obama by 54 percent among white evangelicals. Now, this is not a man conspicuously known for his religion. What's his appeal to them?

MERLE BLACK: Kind of the same appeal that Ronald Reagan had, didn't it? You know, Reagan, you know, Jimmy Carter versus Ronald Reagan, in terms of regular church going-
BILL MOYERS: Jimmy Carter was from Georgia, right?

MERLE BLACK: Yeah, that's not contest. But, in terms of getting those votes, you know, the-

BILL MOYERS: Why?

MERLE BLACK: Why?

BILL MOYERS: Why?

MERLE BLACK: Because of values are important to them.

BILL MOYERS: What values?

MERLE BLACK: The values of life. Of respect for life. For this kind of thing that they don't see in the Democratic Party. And these are individuals, many of them, now, if they really thought economics was the most important reason, they'd do something else somewhere else.

These are all, you know, I had a guy, several years ago in Georgia, my car broke down. I was taken over to the place. He drives me over there. He didn't own the towing company. He's a worker there. He drives out of the way to go by his church that night. He invites me to come. They're having choir practice that night, or whatever. He's telling me, he's showing me what's important in his life.

BILL MOYERS: Do you think all of this God talk in Denver this week, and almost every speaker ended with, "God bless America." And there were more rabbis and imams and preachers and evangelists. In fact, after Obama's speech, Thursday night, the benediction of that massive event, was given by Joel Hunter, who's the pastor of this very large evangelical church in Florida. Is that going to help the Democrats?

EARL BLACK: I think it's an indication that the Democrats know what the problem is. They're trying to reestablish contact here. But I think a lot of that's going to be discounted.

MERLE BLACK: Well, I think most of the white working class wasn't watching that convention.

BILL MOYERS: No. You write in here that our politics becomes much more interesting and easier to understand when the party battles are examined region by region. Why?

EARL BLACK: Well, you can't understand the nation just by looking at national outcomes. Because America's too diverse. And so what we say is, Okay, we look at the nation, or because, in this country, we have electoral votes so the 50 states are important. But we can't look at all 50 states. So, as a shorthand way, we think the quick and dirty way to kind of understand the fundamental divisions is divide the 50 states into these five regions. And look at the electorate and then the outcomes of recent elections.

And, when we do that, we find that the South plus the Mountain Plains give the Republicans two regional strongholds that together, control about two fifths of the electoral vote in the nation. The Northeast plus the pacific coast give the Democrats their two regional strongholds.

That's just slightly smaller than the Republican strongholds. So even if both parties sweep their two strongholds, that doesn't get them a majority of the electoral votes. And that means that certain states, especially in the Midwest, and of course, the key bellwether state in the Midwest is Ohio. That's the state that makes or breaks in the Republicans' success of carrying that the last two times. That what made the Republicans the victors.

BILL MOYERS: So the swing states still matter. That's where the battle will be fought.

MERLE BLACK: Yeah, let me get one other point in here. When you look at it in terms of the regions, because the parties have different regional strongholds, when one party's in power, what it can actually do, that means the opposite party doesn't go out of power, necessarily, it may actually get stronger in response to what's going on at the national level - that's exactly what we see here in the Northeast.
BILL MOYERS: Yeah, you say that the Republicans' remarkable success in the South has created a new northern problem for them.

MERLE BLACK: Yes, the Northeast is declining in relative size. It's got 92 house seats right now. It'll probably be below 90 the next time we redrew the map. But in terms of Democratic strength, the Democrats have gotten a lot stronger in the Northeast, and Republicans a lot weaker.

Because the Republican Party dominated by the conservatives of the South and Midwest really alienates lots of Republicans in the Northeast. That's not their old kind of Republican Party, and the party of Eisenhower, or something like that. So actually, the Democrats are helped by the Republicans in power this last eight years. That's been a godsend for the Democratic Party here in the Northeast.

BILL MOYERS: And that's why, largely, they took the congress back in '06, right?

MERLE BLACK: That's right. Huge gain. Democrats now have a 44 seat advantages in the Northeast alone.

BILL MOYERS: Well, we think about the presidential campaign. But what do you see happening, you know, below the White House and the Senate and the Congressional races in these regions?

EARL BLACK: Well, I think the Democrats are poised to pick up additional seats in the Senate and the House. It would be very unlikely for the Republicans to have any serious effort to take back either branch of Congress. The only election where the Republicans have a chance is the presidential election. And that is one that could easily go either way.

BILL MOYERS: The polls show that it's much closer than people thought it would be.

MERLE BLACK: Well, I think the Democrats are clearly favored. Almost any Democratic nominee ought to be able to beat any Republican nominee for president in this year, given unpopularity of George Bush, the state of the economy, all those kinds of factors.

BILL MOYERS: And yet?

MERLE BLACK: And yet, well, the President comes down to a choice of individuals. You know, where voters look at candidates and make judgments about their quality of their leadership, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. So I think the debates this fall are going to be extraordinarily interesting. We're going to have a huge audience. Not only in the US, but in the world.

EARL BLACK: You know, you have this dynamic where, of course, in presidential elections, because of the focus on the individuals, international policy, events overseas, war in Iraq, obviously, but also, here's Russia, you know, invading Georgia, things like that.

All of those things bring international dimensions to a fore that become part of the judgment and especially work into a judgment of who the American people trust to be a commander in chief more than the other.

That creates a dynamic that when you add it to domestic issues, that is one of the reasons why John McCain, who would otherwise be a clear underdog, you know, is not somebody that you just write off and say, "Couldin't possibly win this election."

BILL MOYERS: Victor Navasky of the "Columbia Journalism Review", says that undecided voters don't care about left or right. They simply want a candidate they can trust. And, while he's a progressive, a liberal, he went on to say that Obama's been making the same mistake Gore and Kerry made. That, by appealing to the center, he's undermining the things undecided voters most want. And that is authenticity.

MERLE BLACK: Well, the undecided voters, the ones in the middle are what we call moderate independents. These are people who are independent in partisanship. They're neither Democrats or Republicans. So a partisan appeal doesn't work for them.

In terms of ideology they're neither liberals nor conservatives. They're kind of moderates. And some of these individuals don't pay much attention to politics. And they may just get
interested in the closing days of the campaign.

And what they're looking at is, in terms of likeability, do they like these people? Which guy do they like here? The ones that they're looking at? Or, is this person going to do something very specific for them. Not abstraction. They're not interested in abstraction. They're interested in very specific types of things. If they've got a real concern that they want to be spoken to, and one person is doing it to the other, they'll vote for him.

EARL BLACK: You know, and the moderate independents are going to be more prominent in some states than other ones. You know, a state like New York or California, there's no need for the Democrats to worry about the moderate independents. There are enough partisan Democrats in those states to make majorities without really consideration.

Those are the ones where the Republicans won't spend a nickel because the cause is hopeless. Now, in some of those battleground states like Ohio and others, that's where I suspect the moderate independents make the difference between - after your strong partisans, you make majority. So, in those states, winning those is really critical.

BILL MOYERS: Apart from reading your book, what would you - what's a one line strategy you would offer McCain and Obama as they act on the fact that regions decide our elections today. What advice would you give them?

MERLE BLACK: Well, pick out a small number of regions-

EARL BLACK: States.

MERLE BLACK: Just a small number of states in the regions where the vote is really undecided and put a lot of campaign resources into those states. So, for Obama, I think it's important for him to try to compete in some of those southern states, like Virginia or Florida. For McCain, he's got to recreate what George Bush won in 2004. And he's in the weaker position, because he needs more of these states, I think, than Obama needs right now.

EARL BLACK: Yeah, you have the demographics working in the Democrats' favor in states like Colorado and elsewhere where the Democrats think that we lost closely in 2004, we could probably win this year.

So a few of those states are going to be targeted. The Republicans don't have that many states to target. But the key things, I think, if you go back to the Democratic primaries. One of the really interesting features was Obama's early success that then was stymied when Hillary Clinton came on late.

And where did she come on with great success? Well, states like Pennsylvania, Ohio, elsewhere. Well, Pennsylvania's been a strong Democratic state in general elections. Ohio's been a close state. Those are the states where, I think, McCain, you know, would see, based on the Democratic primaries, an attempt to try to pick up in Ohio. Go into Pennsylvania. You know, the McCain campaign is going to, I think, over the weekend, before the convention starts, they're going into Ohio this morning. And they're going into Pennsylvania.

BILL MOYERS: Yeah, that's where he made his announcement, Ohio.

EARL BLACK: Exactly. And, the Democrats are doing the same thing. And Joe Biden's on the ticket, in part, because he's going to have some appeal to small town Pennsylvania.

BILL MOYERS: So should all these people, who are just sitting out there in these states that are not contested, just say, "What the heck am I doing here anyway?"

EARL BLACK: That is the sad reality of most of the American states. Because the local traditions are such that the parties are either going to be clear winners or clear losers.

BILL MOYERS: Your work is based upon classic statistics and electoral studies. But in the last 15 months, as you were working on this book, Obama attracted large numbers of new voters in these primaries that you were talking about. How do you weigh the impact on this election of these unidentified new and passionate voters?
**EARL BLACK:** You know, size and partisan unity are the two great political variables. What the Democrats are trying to do with Obama's campaign is increase the size of key demographic groups, African Americans, new minorities, especially Asians. Younger white voters. More liberal, younger, white voters. Those are the key demographics.

**MERLE BLACK:** It's a classic democratic argument. Expand the electorate, bring the non-voters into participation and then you win.

**BILL MOYERS:** This is the bible for all of us who really love politics. And I am sure a lot of my viewers will be going to get "Divided America: The Ferocious Power Struggle In American Politics." Earl Black and Merle Black, thank you for joining me on the JOURNAL.

**EARL BLACK:** Thank you Bill.

**MERLE BLACK:** Thank you Bill.

**BILL MOYERS:** As we speak, the Democrats are on their way home from Denver in time for Labor Day weekend. That's a special holiday for many of them - especially the thousand or more delegates who are either active or retired members of a union, or from households with union members. Organized labor has been wandering in the wilderness for some years now, and its leaders came out in force in Denver, proclaiming: "We're back!"

**GERALD MCENTEE:** We have been tattooed, beaten, bruised, thrown up against walls for the last eight years!

**BILL MOYERS:** Last Sunday, they held a big rally for Obama, calling on him to make union organizing a priority if the Democrats take the White House.

And at the convention itself, sprinkled among the prime-time speakers were some heartfelt, personal stories from union workers including autoworker Robin Golden from Michigan.

**ROBIN GOLDEN:** In two weeks, I'll be unemployed. My job is being shipped to Mexico, along with the jobs of most of my 430 co-workers. That means every single member of my local union will be unemployed in two weeks.

**BILL MOYERS:** In past decades, the voices of the labor movement swelled the Democratic chorus. Then, Democratic presidential candidates officially opened their campaigns in the city that was the symbolic heart of union country - Detroit, then the engine of the booming auto industry. Standing in Cadillac Square on Labor Day was a Democrat's way of saying our hearts are one.

**JOHN F. KENNEDY:** I have come here today on a day that belongs to the working men and women of America...

**BILL MOYERS:** John Kennedy kicked of his campaign for president in Cadillac Square in 1960, praising unions that fought for education, for better health care, even for family farms. Kennedy declared that as unions go, so goes America.

**JOHN F. KENNEDY:** We share a common, deep-seated belief in the workings of free collective bargaining and in the growth of free, responsible unions, and, unlike our opponents, we don't just believe that on Labor Day.

**BILL MOYERS:** These were the golden years for organized labor. Union bargaining power helped lift other worker's boats - and the yachts of their employers - in a rising tide of prosperity that moved millions of families into the middle class.

But that seems now another age, another world. Union membership has plummeted from Kennedy's day - down to less than 8% of the private sector workforce. Millions of union jobs have been lost to cheap labor abroad, and to consumers who demand cheaper prices. Corporations have warped relentlessly on unions, in league with a conservative movement that regards business as its own ATM machine. Collusion between government and corporations in the global economy has left workers to fend for themselves. The results have been disastrous.

Job security - slashed. Pensions - slashed. Healthcare benefits - slashed. In a golden age of
profit-taking and extravagant wealth for CEOs, compensation for employees, as a share of the total economy, has reached a new low.

And even with the Democratic party, labor's place at the table can not be taken for granted. President Bill Clinton after all championed NAFTA, the trade deal that sent manufacturing jobs overseas. Barack Obama has wavered on his opposition to reopening NAFTA. Democrats in Congress are being inundated with money from corporations. And in Denver this week, those same corporations were hosting lavish parties - captured here by ABC News' Investigative Unit shelling out millions to wine and dine Democratic officials.

**BRIAN ROSS:** "Lobbyists gone wild!"

**BILL MOYERS:** A house divided can hardly be called the home of working people.

So for all the rhetoric and cheer in Denver, workers have little to celebrate this Labor Day - they've been falling farther behind for years now. But across the country, there are growing signs of defiance:

You see it as California nurses pushed for universal health care... you see it as workers march in Los Angeles for a living wage... you see it in immigrants fighting back against a system that hires them to pick and prepare our food, yet pays them pitiful wages and treats them as criminals.

It just might be that that same spirit of anger roused by injustice... that old and enduring hunger of working men and women for a better deal... it just might be the spark that catches fire, lighting the way once again for politicians returning to Cadillac Square on Labor Day.

That's it for the JOURNAL. We'll see you again next week. I'm Bill Moyers.

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