Twitter Thread by Kevin M. Kruse



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Man, I don't even know where to begin with this

> George Wallace. The Democrat who stood in the schoolhouse door trying to keep black kids from going to white schools. The Democrat... https://t.co/nZL7n937nX
>
> — Jesse Kelly (@JesseKellyDC) October 23, 2018

First of all, yes, of course George Wallace was a Democrat. Most southern segregationists in the 1960s were.

If you think this is some kind of clever gotcha, you *really* should have paid more attention in history class.

Second, yes, George Wallace *did* stand in the schoolhouse door to keep African American college students -- who weren't really "kids" -- from going to the University of Alabama.

But, hey, who was standing on the other side? Different Democrats!

Here's the iconic photo.

That's Wallace standing off to the left. And on the right, trying to escort Vivian Malone and James Hood onto campus and sweating hard, that's Deputy Attorney General Nick Katzenbach from the Kennedy administration.

Kennedy was a Democrat, by the way.

The "stand in the schoolhouse door" illustrates the internal divide in the Democratic Party over racial issues in the 1960s.

On one side (literally!), the old Dixiecrats who used to control the party; on the other, the new northern, liberal Democrats who favored civil rights.

Third, just a year after that iconic showdown, George Wallace waged a strong presidential campaign in the 1964 Democratic primaries, running as a segregationist, denouncing the "Civil Wrongs Bill" that Congress had just passed.

But...

The Civil Rights Act had been introduced by JFK, then significantly strengthened by LBJ after JFK's assassination, and pushed through the Democratic-controlled House and the Democratic-controlled Senate.

To pre-empt the trolls, I'll pause to add this: https://t.co/dMzEDINE7Y

> "But Republicans Voted in Higher Percentages for the Civil Rights Act":https://t.co/Htd6nOFWow
>
> — Kevin M. Kruse (@KevinMKruse) August 5, 2018

Yes, southern Democrats were the chief obstacle there, and George Wallace channeled that rage into a strong primary showing against the incumbent president who had pushed for the Civil Rights Act and signed it with Martin Luther King, Jr., at his side -- Lyndon B. Johnson.

Again, let me note that Johnson was *also* a Democrat.

At the risk of repeating myself, the party was deeply divided over civil rights in the 1960s. It had been for decades, and would take a while longer to sort itself out.

But LBJ? Democrat.

Everyone with me?

OK, moving on.

Fourth, when Wallace's primary bid in the Democratic Party failed, what did he do?

He contacted Barry Goldwater's campaign with an offer to switch his party affiliation to Republican and run as Goldwater's VP.

Another thread: https://t.co/Eb6SGJBiY8

> George Wallace's Offer to Switch Parties:https://t.co/n0LmP6Gxfr
>
> — Kevin M. Kruse (@KevinMKruse) August 5, 2018

Fifth, Wallace stayed a Democrat for most of his life -- except for his major run for the presidency in 1968 as an independent -- but he still inspired lots of imitators, including many of the first Southern Republicans.

One more thread: https://t.co/anAhUCcrJW

> The Rise of Southern Republicans:https://t.co/Y7yCfwzPLs
>
> — Kevin M. Kruse (@KevinMKruse) August 5, 2018

Sixth, the most successful Wallace copycat was the Nixon-Agnew presidential campaign, which borrowed so many of his themes -- notably the call for "law and order" -- that Wallace joked to reporters that he should've copyrighted his speeches.

In the end, if you think parties never changes and that a Democrat or Republican from 1960 is the same as one from 1860 or 2010, or that all members of a party in any year were the same, you should really read some political history.

Any of it. Pick a book at random.