

Huberty Humphrey

A Plea For Civil Rights

In 1948, the Democratic Party was in a quandary. FDR had died in 1945 and Truman was unable to hold the party factions together. In walked **Hubert Humphrey** (Philadelphia Democratic Convention). He was mayor of Minneapolis and a senate candidate. Before that, he was a pharmacist and a teacher. Below is an excerpt from his plea for a bold stance on civil rights. When the convention sided with him, the southern Democrats bolted. Despite this, **Harry Truman** (Democrat) defeated **Thomas Dewey** (Republican), **Strom Thurman** (Dixiecrat). **Henry Wallace** also ran as a Progressive with strong civil rights views. Humphrey later became vice president under **Lyndon Baines Johnson**. He then lost the 1968 election to **Richard Nixon**. As you analyze this speech, consider what is being proposed, what the rationales are, what strategies are used to persuade, what the significance of history prior and after this convention is... etc. Record your analysis in your spiral.

“I realize that I am dealing with a charged issue – with an issue which has been confused by emotionalism on all sides. I realize that there are those here – friends and colleagues of mine, many of them – who feel as deeply as I do about this issue and who are yet in complete disagreement with me.

...My respect and admiration for these men and their views was great when I came here.

...It is now far greater because of the sincerity, the courtesy and the forthrightness with which they have argued in our discussions.

...Because of this very respect – because of my profound belief that we have a challenging task to do here – because good conscience demands it – I feel I must rise at this time to support this report – a report that spells out our democracy, a report that the people will understand and enthusiastically acclaim.

...Let me say at the outset that this proposal is made with no single region, no single class, no single racial or religious group in mind.

...All regions and all states have shared in the precious heritage of American freedom. All states and all religions have at least some infringements of that freedom – all people; all groups have been the victims of discrimination.

...As our keynote speaker said, Thomas Jefferson did not proclaim that all white, or black, or red, or yellow men are equal; that all Christian or Jewish men are equal; that all Protestant and Catholic men are equal; that all rich or poor men are equal; that all good or bad men are equal. What he declared was that all men are equal; and the equality which he proclaimed was equality in the right to enjoy the blessings of free government in which they may participate and to which they have given their consent.

...We are here as Democrats. But more important, as Americans – and I firmly believe that as men concerned with our country’s future, we must specify in our platform the guarantees which I have mentioned.

...Yes, this is far more than a party matter. Every citizen has a stake in the emergence of the U.S. as the leader of the free world. That world is being challenged by the world of slavery. For us to play our part effectively, we must be in a morally sound position.

...We cannot use a double standard for measuring our own and other people’s policies. Our demands for democratic practices in other lands will be no more effective than the guarantees of those practiced in our own country.

...We are God-fearing men and women. We place our faith in the brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God.

...I do not believe that there can be any compromise of the guarantees of civil rights which I have mentioned. ...In spite of my desire for unanimous agreement on the platform there are some matters which I think must be stated without qualification. ...There can be no hedging – no watering down.

There are those who say to you – we are rushing this issue of civil rights. I say we are 172 years late.

...There are those who say – this issue of civil rights is an infringement on states’ rights. The time has arrived for the Democratic party to get out of the shadow of states’ rights and walk forthrightly into the sunshine of human rights.

...People – human beings – this is the issue of the 20th century. People – all kinds and all sorts of people – look to America for leadership – for help – for guidance.

...My friends... I ask you for a calm consideration... Let us forget the evil passions, the blindness of the past. In these times of world economic, political, and spiritual – above all, spiritual crisis, we cannot – we must not, turn from the path so plainly before us.

...That path has already led us through many valleys of the shadow of death. Now is the time to recall those who were left on the path of American freedom.

...For all of us here, for the millions who have sent us, for the whole two billion members of the human family – our land is now, more than ever, the last best hope on earth. I know that we can – I know that we shall – begin here the fuller and richer realization of that hope – that promise of a land where all men are free and equal, and each man uses his freedom and equality wisely and well.”

United States presidential election, 1948



1944 ←

November 2, 1948

→ 1952



Nominee	Harry S. Truman	Thomas E. Dewey	Strom Thurmond
Party	Democratic	Republican	Dixiecrat
Home state	Missouri	New York	South Carolina
Running mate	Alben W. Barkley	Earl Warren	Fielding L. Wright
Electoral vote	303	189	39
States carried	28	16	4
Popular vote	24,179,347	21,991,292	1,175,930
Percentage	49.6%	45.1%	2.4%

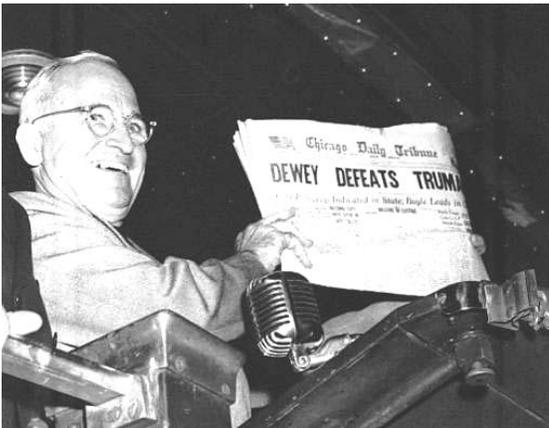
Strom Thurmond became a South Carolina senator (1954-2003... 100 years old when he retired) who opposed the Civil Rights Amendment and de-segregation. He later changed his stand and integrated his office.

DYK: At his 100th birthday party on December 5, 2002, Senator Trent Lott said of Thurmond "I want to say this about my state: When Strom Thurmond ran for president, we voted for him. We're proud of it. And if the rest of the country had followed our lead, we wouldn't have had all these problems over all these years, either." Amid widespread criticism over his remarks, Lott resigned the Republican leadership on December 20, 2002.



Thomas Dewey was governor of New York from 1943-1954. After that he returned to law and worked for the Republican Party. He left the party when they endorsed Barry Goldwater in 1964. *DYK:* President LBJ offered him a Supreme Court spot but he declined.

Henry Wallace also ran for president in 1948. He was vice president under FDR from 1941-1945 (replaced by Truman and later fired by Truman as Secretary of Commerce. Truman fired him over conflicting Cold War views.



The Chicago Tribune incorrectly estimated Dewey won and published before all the votes were counted.

Wallace ran as a Progressive Party and earned only 2.4% of the popular vote. His platform advocated friendly relations with the Soviet Union, an end Cold War, an end to segregation, full voting rights for blacks, and universal government health insurance. His campaign was unusual for his time in that it included African American candidates campaigning alongside white candidates in the American South, and that during the campaign he refused to appear before segregated audiences or eat or stay in segregated establishments.

He was labeled a communist and never stood a chance in this era... but... it was a step...

What is the significance of the regional votes?

Had the Democratic Party been united, could they have defeated Truman?