. . . Nineties (Continued from Page 4)

Somewhat reminiscent of Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition, the Alliance fought for easier credit, lower prices, and a greater voice in American government.

In the South, the alliance very nearly broke the power of the Southern conservatives. But White leaders were able to split the African - American and White vote by appealing to the poor Whites pride of race, thus destroying southern populism.

Southern conservatives learned from that battle. The threat that the united White and Black vote held was a formidable one, and Southern conservatives moved quickly to eliminate it.

For those African - Americans unwilling to give up their right to vote, violence often settled the issue in favor of White supremacists.

"This, Mr. Chairman, is perhaps the Negroes temporary farewell to the American Congress; but let me say, Phoenix-like, he will rise up some day and come again."

Cong. George H. White

The Southern Strategy Reprise

As we examine the modern political landscape, a number of comparisons can be made between the years that followed Reagan's ascendancy and political and judicial policy of a century ago.

Presidents Reagan and Bush are following a pattern first pursued with success by former President Richard Nixon.

Shortly before the 1988 general election campaign began, the now - disgraced Nixon met with President Bush's campaign manager Lee Atwater. The two drafted a campaign plan which involved going after the same Southern states that gave Jesse Jackson victories during the primary elections.

By playing on White fears and inadequacies, the Republicans were able to perpetuate the Southern strategy which helped them retain the presidency.

The Role of the Supreme Court

It is no accident that today's Supreme Court, like their antecendents of a century past, have begun examining with reservation civil rights laws created during the past two decades. The Supreme Court, despite statements to the contrary, has always been sensitive to the political winds. Reagan appointed more justices than any president in modern history. It is his court, and their actions unfortunately reflect the conservative Southern Strategy of the modern Republican party.

A century ago, the Supreme Court also mirrored the political environment, and joined in the general civil and political dismembering of African - Americans. In 1883 it overturned the 1875 Civil Rights law, which had guaranteed equal access to public accommodations. The high court upheld separate but equal Jim Crow laws in the 1896 Plessy vs. Ferguson decision; and in 1898 the Court sanctioned Mississippi's constitutional disenfranchisement of African - Americans.

Modern Times

In 1990, Mississippi boasts its first African - American congressman since Reconstruction, Mike Espy. The freshman Democrat leads the largest number of African - American federal congresspersons, (23) in history. We have surpassed the gains made during Reconstruction, when a total of 26 Blacks entered Congress over a 45 year period. Currently more than 3,949 African - Americans hold municipal or legislative office.

But against the current backdrop of national conservatism, the successes of scores of other African - American officeholders around the nation may not appear as rosy.

In the South, Richard Arrington's election as mayor of Birmingham, Alabama and the emergence of the Andrew Young - Maynard Jackson leadership circle in Atlanta indicate that African - Americans are once more rising in the South.

In the West, state Assembly representatives such as Maxine Waters and Willie Brown have emerged as powerful brokers. Tom Bradley, a former policeman, has developed a strong political machine as the seven - term mayor of Los Angeles.

In the North, David Dinkins of New York City, Sharpe James of Newark, Rep. William Gray of Pennsylvania, all reflect the solid political achievements of the African-American community.

And in the Midwest, the continued success of Detroit Mayor Coleman Young; and the ongoing political strength of former Gary Mayor Richard Hatcher may point to continued African - American participation in political leadership.

But behind these gains lurk the undercurrent of White racism. In Chicago, for example, the son of former political boss Mayor Richard Daley regained the mayor's seat for Whites by defeating interim Mayor Eugene Sawyer.

In Virginia, the popular Wilder was projected as a sure winner. He had built an estimable career in politics and he was viewed as a moderate. Wilder spent the entire campaign avoiding the race issue and, like Dinkins, made a point of keeping Jesse Jackson at arm's length. But despite his efforts, he won the governor's chair by only 6,700 votes.

Like the African - American legislators who enjoyed a brief moment of power during Reconstruction, Dinkins and Wilder are inheriting communities with grave problems. They, along with the majority of African - American officeholders, represent areas which apparently are on the decline.

But it must be remembered that the African - American legislators of a century ago succeeded in creating constitutionally mandated public education, improving roads and transportation, and helping to restore the shattered economies of the post - Civil War South.

Their confidence in their abilities is probably shared by their successors today, who probably would second former Congressman White's assessment below.

"You may withhold even the knowledge of how to read God's word and learn the way from earth to glory and then taunt us for our ignorance, but we would remind you that there is plenty of room at the top, and we are climbing. . . ."

One hundred years later, the forces which sent White into retirement are still alive. But, as African - Americans continue to heed Jesse Jackson's admonition to "keep hope alive," we are still finding ways to share that room at the top of the political mountain.

Henry House is a freelance writer, living and working in Englewood, New Jersey.

Happy Birthday Aquarius!

By Charles H. Brown

AQUARIUS (January 20 to February 18)

There is a name for people like you; People who like to be where the action is — where the lights are flashing and the atmosphere is heddy with energy. Yeah, there is a word for people like you . . . it's called SOCIAL. But be careful not to overdue it this month or your associates may begin to treat you like a SOCIAL disease.

PISCES (February 19 to March 20)

You may be wonderful at mixing drinks, good at mixing patterns and great at mixing period furniture, but not even you can always be successful at mixing business and pleasure. At times you may come up smelling like a rose, other times you may just smell. To couch it in couture-ial terms; remember that red paisley tie you wore with the white tab-collared black shirt and the grey glen-plaid suit? Aha. Think about it.

ARIES (March 21 to April 19)

Let's be frank — you've got a problem. You come on like ammoniated cleanser and are about as controllable as a turbocharged shopping cart. You roll through relationships the way Bubba Smith rolled through defending tackles and think an extended hand is a come-on. Bottom line: You mistake zeal for sex appeal.

TAURUS (April 20 to May 20)

People lie like rugs. You should know that since you've been sprawled out yourself on occasion. So why are you letting this one broken promise get the better of you. If you had a dime for every time a friend told you one thing and did another, you could pay them for diligence.

GEMINI (May 21 to June 20)

"Running off at the mouth may have worked when you were down south, but Junior — you're in the north now!" Like the man who became too big for his britches you're busting out all over. You have more opinions than talk radio and present them with all the finesse of a heavyweight wrestler. But like a dark cloud, your fit of self-expression will pass. Wonder where all your friends are? They are waiting out the storm.

CANCER (June 21 to July 22)

"Look at her go," your friends say as you speed by on your way to put out another office fire. That's you — constantly running hither and thither, attending to some emergency or another trying to keep it all together before your work all goes up in smoke. It's time to rethink your scheduling practices before someone realizes the best way to stamp out office fires is to douse you.

LEO (July 23 to August 22)

For some people going out is an excuse for not staying in and doing the right thing. Some people think an abandoned problem will find its own solution. The way some people show emotion makes an ice sculpture seem relatively warm - hearted. When you sum it all up, some people are in drastic need of a direction correction. Sound like anyone you know?

VIRGO (August 23 to September 22)

You see your wife as the greatest lady in the world but there is that one little fault . . . your best friend is the best friend a man could have, but there was that one time . . . your new boss is as smart as a whip, but she does have that dandruff and . . . you speak in Criticalese. There is something wrong with everything and nothing is ever quite right. You can't see the forest for the sawdust in your eyes and your taste in clothing is just the other side of hilarious. Other than that you are not half bad.

LIBRA (September 23 to October 22)

You map out entire continents when you are only going around the block. You consult your commodities broker when all you're doing is going grocery shopping, you chart corporate - wide strategies merely to determine if the company can afford a new watercooler and wonder if you are not being too liberal with the assets. Life is too short to be making all those long plans.

SCORPIO (October 23 to November 21)

You draw your wallet about as often as a cowboy in a shoot-em-up western. You place your billfold on automatic and fire on every cash register in sight. Don't you know guns can be dangerous in the hands of someone who doesn't know how to use them. Now put that thing away before you hurt yourself.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22 to December 21)

New ideas go to your head like cheap champagne bubbles. When it comes to novelties, you often find you're the first one in and the last one remaining and if that's not bad enough someone has started the rumor that you have bought a Florida condominium in a town called Swamp Hollow that comes complete with authentic bricks from the Berlin Wall. It would be wise if you began to think in terms of moderation.

CAPRICORN (December 22 to January 19)

Someone close to you believes they are merely one of life's retreads — patched, painted and suitable for limited use. Take the time, no make the time to bolster a buddy. To a friend in need — be a friend indeed.