**Standard 8-7:** The student will demonstrate an understanding of the impact on South Carolina of significant events of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

**Enduring Understanding**

Changes that took place in the United States during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries revitalized the economy and challenged traditional society and politics in South Carolina. To understand the response of South Carolina to these challenges, the student will...

**8-7.3 Explain changing politics in South Carolina, including the role of Strom Thurmond, the shift from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party, the increasing political participation of African Americans and women, and the passage of the Education Improvement Act (EIA).**

**It is essential for students to know:**

In the mid 20th century, political parties shifted in South Carolina as a result of the evolving position of the Democratic Party on issues of race and other issues of interest to conservative Southerners. In order to understand this shift, students must first understand why South Carolina and the rest of the South were solidly Democratic prior to the emergence of the modern civil rights movement.

Although many Lowcountry planters supported the Federalist Party of Alexander Hamilton in the early years of the republic (8-3.4), as the political power of the national Federalists waned and that of the backcountry and the Lowcountry of South Carolina equalized (8-3.1), South Carolina became predominantly Democratic-Republican and then Democratic. In the pre-Civil War period, the Republican Party emerged as a coalition of groups opposed to the expansion of slavery into the territories. South Carolina seceded as a result of the election of the Republican candidate Abraham Lincoln in 1860 (8.4-3). In the Reconstruction period, when the so-called radical Republicans attempted to reconstitute South Carolina’s government to include active participation by freedmen, the majority of the white population refused to participate in the Republican government, ultimately “redeemed” the government of South Carolina by returning it to white control, and subsequently disenfranchised the African American voter(8-5). Blaming the Republicans for both the war and Reconstruction, South Carolina, like other southern states, voted solidly Democratic and became a part of what was known as the “solid South.”

Conservative Southerners and South Carolinians initially supported the New Deal of Democrat Franklin Roosevelt but became suspicious of Roosevelt as he increasingly attracted African American voters in the North to the New Deal. Shortly after World War II ended, President Harry Truman ordered the desegregation of the military (1948) and supported the inclusion of planks in the Democratic Party platform (1948) supporting anti-poll tax legislation and federal protection against lynching measures aimed at rectifying the deplorable conditions for African Americans. Incensed at this intrusion into the affairs of the states, many delegates from the South walked out of the Democratic National Convention. They formed their own party, which became known as the Dixiecrats, and named South Carolina’s Strom Thurmond as their presidential candidate. Thurmond carried South Carolina in the 1948 presidential election. Although Thurmond and other South Carolinians returned to the Democratic Party after the Dixiecrat’s defeat, this was the beginning of the end of the solidly Democratic South.

In 1947, the Supreme Court had ruled in *Elmore v. Rice* that the white primary was unconstitutional (8-7.2) and had later ruled that segregation of the public schools was also unconstitutional (*Brown v Board of Education*)(8-7.2). South Carolina’s Senator Strom Thurmond continued to lead resistance to recognizing the rights of African Americans. Thurmond opposed implementation of the *Brown* ruling by writing the Southern Manifesto condemning the *Brown* decision and encouraging resistance to desegregation. Senator Thurmond also holds the record [24 hours 18 minutes] for his filibuster against the passage of a civil rights act that would provide some federal protection for the right to vote (1957). As Democratic presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson responded to the Civil Rights Movement with support for the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, southern Democrats, most notably Strom Thurmond, withdrew their support for the president and the Democratic Party. Thurmond changed his party affiliation from Democrat to Republican (1964). South Carolina has voted for the Republican candidate since 1964 with only one exception (1976 when Georgia’s Jimmy Carter carried the state). Republican candidate Richard Nixon was supported by Thurmond in the 1968 election and would win further support with his ‘southern strategy’ of resisting the expansion of civil rights protections and thus appealing to southern voters. Ronald Reagan appealed to South Carolinians because of his stand on taxes and the Cold War.

Other factors cemented South Carolina’s return to the Republican Party. Protests against the Vietnam War were seen by many in a state heavily committed to the military as unpatriotic and were associated with the Democratic Party. Richard Nixon’s campaign promise to restore “law and order” appealed to conservative Southerners who feared the backlash of the black power movement as well as the antiwar protests. Fundamentalist and evangelical churches, prominent in the South, organized politically as social conservatives and became a cornerstone of the growing conservative movement.

African Americans have been able to vote in increasingly larger numbers as a result of the *Elmore v Rice* decision, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the anti poll tax amendment to the constitution (24th amendment). Although African Americans supported the Republican Party that won them their freedom and protected it during Reconstruction, they have consistently supported the Democratic Party since the mid 1960s because of the Democratic Party’s support for civil rights. African Americans make up about 28% of the population of South Carolina (2010 Census), so they have had limited impact on presidential elections in a state with a winner- take-all policy granting all electoral votes to the candidate that gains the majority. At present (2012), African Americans hold 38 seats in the South Carolina legislature.

The Civil Rights Movement contributed to a reemergence of the women’s rights movement. South Carolina finally ratified the 19th Amendment in 1969, although South Carolina women had been able to vote since 1920. South Carolina was one of ten states that failed to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment and so the Amendment failed. South Carolina women have had prominent roles in government including women who have served in Congress, as Lieutenant Governor and as members of the state legislature. Currently (2012) there are 16 women serving in the state legislature.

Education continued to be an area of concern even after integration made the equalization effort (8-7.2) moot. In order to ensure continued economic growth successive governors backed state funding of a minimal level of education for all of the state’s children funded by a sales tax. At the urging of the business community, South Carolina led the nation in addressing issues of education with the Education Improvement Act in the mid-1980s. The act called for an additional 1 cent in sales tax for education. Although improvement was seen in the graduation rate and the number of students who attend college, inequality continues and the funding has proved unstable. The state has cut funding in the last several years because of lower revenues due to the recession. Wealthy districts are able to tap into local resources while poor districts are unable to fully fund education for their children. The achievement gap continues to be the legacy of years of discrimination in educational opportunity. The Education Improvement Act of the 1980s and Educational Accountability Act of the 1990s were passed to ensure that all South Carolina children have equal opportunity to learn. National education legislation [NCLB] established an evaluation system based on state standards.