



The Election of 2004 – Collective Memory Project

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Q: Charlie, when does the story of the 2004 election begin? What's the first crucial event or development that began -- that should be on page one of that story?

COOK: Well, I always think that presidential campaigns in some ways start the day after the previous election. I mean, that's sort of what sets things up; that's when people start thinking about, gosh, this is something I might want to do, that sort of thing. So I think it starts in an embryonic state back then, and then as you flow through the first year of a presidency, you have people in the opposition party starting to, like, really think about getting in. And then that thinking gets more serious during the midterm election year. And traditionally I think candidates start -- would-be candidates start, you know, making real decisions right after the midterm elections. So, you know, November, December, first three, four months of the year. And that's becoming even more [00:01:00] the case, because when you look at the absolutely colossal amounts of money that these people have to raise -- they have to get started very, very, very early on. So they really need all that time.

Q: I get the sense from things I've read that in the immediate aftermath of the 2000 election, once all the dust settled --

COOK: Yeah, that would have delayed it, yeah.

Q: Yeah, delayed. But the Bush people wondered, "Where did our big lead go? And we thought we were going to have a higher turnout from, say, white evangelical voters, and our turnout operation wasn't --" I wonder, did you -- did the Republicans in



particular sort of look at 2000 -- they probably knew who their candidate was going to be in '04, but think, "Here's things we need to start looking at right now"?

COOK: I think the 2000 election results so scared them that they probably started in earnest sooner than they would have normally. [00:02:00] And I think it led to Karl Rove and the Bush folks doing a lot of really, really innovative -- I mean, a lot of innovative political techniques that I'd say came to full blossom with the Obama campaign in 2012. But you know, the very earliest micro-targeting, data mining and all these things, you know, really go back to that 2004 Bush campaign. And I've got to think losing the popular vote, coming so close to losing the election, was an impetus for them to say, "OK, we can't do this the way we did it last time and the way Republicans have ever done it; we've got to do it real differently." So I think it cranked up real, real, real early.

Q: And it's interesting, because the Bush election crew in '04 was pretty much the same team as in 2000, [00:03:00] which is not always the case.

COOK: At some level, but you know, you had people like, what, Terry Nelson was the field director, as I remember, of the Bush campaign. And you had some people that were new faces in some of the operational roles, but yes, it was -- you know, and the high command was, you know, pretty close to the same group of folks. And I think that speaks to the loyalty. You know, when you go through the strengths and liabilities of any public figure, I think for President George W. Bush, the loyalty that his people had for him really stood out. And that was one reason why there was minimal leaking to the press of anything they didn't want out in 2000, 2004; it was very tightly controlled, [00:04:00] and the staff were very, very loyal to him. And I think he returned that loyalty to them. And that's a big deal. And after President Bush, you know, you'd have to have gone to maybe Obama 2008 to find a campaign where you had that kind of tight relationship between the team and the candidate, so that there was very, very little leakage. Less so in 2012, but definitely, definitely in 2008. So you know, campaign technology expertise kind of jumps in leaps and bounds. In a lot of ways, I think the 2004 campaign was sort of the beginning of the most modern era of campaign technology, in that, you know, the Obama 2012 strategy, [00:05:00] I think, was almost lifted page-for-page from the Rove strategy for 2004.

Q: So you mentioned micro-targeting. What other things -- micro-targeting: maybe we should explain what that is. And then other things...

COOK: Well, it's using -- I'll sort of merge them together: the data-mining micro-targeting is using every possible bit of data you could find to figure out who is -- you know, what makes somebody tick. Let me grossly simplify it. You know, if you're a man and



you've got a hunting license -- if you're a white man with a hunting license, the odds of you voting Republican are extremely high. You know, subscribe to *Field and Stream* magazine. I mean, you'd go way, way, way out. And if -- conversely, [00:06:00] if you subscribe to -- I'm making this up -- the *Organic Farmer*, you know, odds are, you know, you're probably going to be more likely to vote for a more liberal candidate, for a Democratic candidate. And you know, back during those days, I used to say that the white -- at least in terms of white voters, and you really do have to separate white from African American and Hispanic -- was the way to tell where whites were going to vote Democratic versus Republican was, you know, proximity to and concentration of Starbucks compared to Walmarts. Now, since then, both Starbucks and Walmarts have become ubiquitous, but my colleague here at the Cook Political Report, David Wasserman, and he's also our House editor, he's now -- he had actually -- he was a graduate student at, or he was an undergraduate student at University of Virginia for Larry Sabato. And apparently he heard me say that on C-SPAN and he wrote his paper where he looked at precincts in Virginia [00:07:00] and Starbucks and Walmarts, and I got this email from Larry saying, "Hey, one of my kids did a paper, and you know, you were absolutely right" -- when I was just sort of making it up; it was just kind of a guess. But anyway, he's kind of updated that to -- to now it's Whole Foods versus Cracker Barrel. And he's matched up -- in counties with Cracker Barrels, how they voted versus counties with Whole Foods. And it's definitely there. So it's matching up sort of geo-demographic, psycho-graphic information, and helping you figure out, you know, who's likely to do what.

But part of the strategy, as best I could tell, for the Bush campaign -- it was a feeling that independent voters and undecided voters were not likely to break towards President Bush. And so they could spend all their money chasing after a group of people [00:08:00] who were extremely familiar with President Bush and were still undecided or take that money to go after -- into areas where clearly the kinds of people who live in that neighborhood, in that precinct, in that part of town, they're clearly very, very, very likely to vote Republican, so how do you crank that up? I mean, finding a precinct where, let's say, Republicans can count on 62% of the vote but that only 400 people usually vote in that precinct -- well, what if they could get 500 people out of that precinct? 550, 600? Holding up that kind of percentage, by going after people just like all the others but who are highly variable in terms of their likelihood of voting. And so what they started trying to do is sort of organically grow



their base, as opposed to what may very well have been a fruitless effort towards chasing after [00:09:00] undecideds. And I would say that's exactly what President Obama's campaign did in 2012, where, you know, his numbers didn't look good with independents. And, you know, they could chase those folks or they could just try to ratchet up the turnout in the groups that they were more confident they'd be able to do well. So again, it was straight out of the 2004 playbook.

Q: Well, back to the aftermath of the 2000 election: Bush is appealing to the voters that year basically on matters of domestic policy. I mean, there's a sense that the world is in pretty good shape -- and then 9/11 occurs. How did that change the context of politics for the next several years?

COOK: Well, let me reach back just a bit first and then get to your point. [00:10:00] There was a -- I thought the 2000 Bush/Gore campaign, up until Election Day, was actually one of the more civil affairs that we had seen in recent years. It was not -- you know, from the -- we thought things had gotten pretty nasty during the Clinton years, and heck, there was an impeachment. And Republicans -- you know, a lot of Republican voters were just -- you know, found Bill Clinton revolting. And so given that sort of edginess, that polarization we had had, the choice between Bush and Gore, up until Election Day, it wasn't a particularly acerbic campaign. And it wasn't until the Florida challenge that suddenly what had been a relatively non-acrimonious campaign became, you know, the hardest edge -- one of the ones that we've ever had. And suddenly the whole complexion of the [00:11:00] Bush presidency, politically speaking, got changed. I mean, it would be fascinating if we could go back, turn the clock back, and say, "George W. Bush won Florida by 20,000 votes, and it's totally uncontested." Had that happened, I think the whole mindset in the country would have been very different. And instead you had, you know, almost half the country thought he was an illegitimate president. Thought that he shouldn't be president. Which is kind of a foreshadowing of the whole birther business

Q: So if Bush had won Florida by 20,000 votes...

COOK: Yeah. Had President Bush -- or had Governor Bush won Florida by 20,000 votes that were absolutely uncontested, I think the whole atmosphere of his first year in office would have been completely different. And you know, you had this sense among a lot of Democrats and a lot of liberals that he was illegitimate. That he wasn't really elected. And obviously if you're elected with fewer -- with less than the majority or less than -- with fewer popular votes, there's going to be a little bit of that anyway, but had that not happened, I think the whole tone would have been very different. And I think that the strategy that President Bush employed [00:12:00] after he did



take office was one of “act like we won big and people will treat us that way.” Which I personally think was probably the right way to do it. But that just incensed people -- certain people that were going to hate him no matter what -- incensed them even more. So it created a very, very odd dynamic that sort of stayed in place all the way up to 9/11.

Q: And then...?

COOK: And then -- and then it was sort of like everything was sort of -- kind of a hiatus for a year or so. The President’s numbers just went sky-high, and you know, if you’re in the White House for something like that, my assumption is going to be, you know, yeah, these are great numbers, but they’re not real. And we have to be prepared for the time [00:13:00] when these numbers, approval numbers are not stratospheric and that he’s back to a mere mortal again, and wage -- compare a campaign with the knowledge that sooner or later things will get back to normal. Which it did. Actually, his numbers stayed up a lot longer than I think just about anybody expected, and frankly, might have stayed up longer had the whole controversy over the war in Iraq... And I remember the day after 9/11, when members of Congress, both parties, House and Senate, gathered on the steps of the Capitol Building, and they sang “God Bless America.” And I remember thinking, gosh, maybe something good is going to come out of this horrific tragedy. But pretty soon the fight over -- and I don’t blame either side, but, you know, [00:14:00] should we go to war with Iraq, yes or no? comes out and basically rips things up even more than they were before. So the possibility for unity kind of went away with the debate over going to war with Iraq. And I tend to think now in 2013, my gosh, if 9/11 couldn’t bring this country and Congress together for any sustained period of time, you know, what in the world would it really take? And that’s really kind of a scary thought.

But anyway, it sort of delayed the start of the presidential campaign, because, number one -- first of all, who wants to come out and say “I’m running against a president that’s got approval ratings in the 70s or 60s?” And secondly, it would be in poor taste after a national tragedy. [00:15:00] And you’re not going to get a lot of attention anyway. And so it really pushed back the real start of the Democratic campaign.

Q: Well, I was thinking as you were speaking that those unusually high approval ratings lasted all through 2002. And meanwhile, Bush is out there, I think more than any other president in history, raising money, speaking on behalf of Republican candidates in the midterm. So I’m interested in your reaction to that, but the



question here is, did those new techniques that the Republicans were developing based on their disappointment with 2000 get a test-drive in the midterms?

COOK: To the extent it was, it was in very, very, very narrow test, and one that nationally you wouldn't even notice. But I'm told there were test areas in markets [00:16:00] where they did some things. But on a widespread basis, no. And I would add, Democrat/Republican -- I think President Reagan is the only president I ever saw who broke a sweat, I mean, really, on behalf of his party's Congressional candidates. And I would say President Bush, considerably less so, but still more than -- I mean, President Obama has done practically nothing for Democratic candidates. So you know, it's all relative. But it was very, very limited, and only done to the extent of -- for their own information of what works and what might not work. But presidents and presidential staffs, you know, their number one priority is reelection -- [00:17:00] I mean, politically speaking. Obviously there are other objectives, policy objectives. But you know, number one, get reelected, number two, get reelected, number three, get reelected. And building up bigger numbers in Congress, you know, it would be overly generous to say that that's a tertiary consideration.

Q: Well, but he gained back the Senate for the Republicans.

COOK: Right, but it... it was -- it clearly is in the backseat. And I've never -- again, Ronald Reagan used to do -- they would line up candidates for the House and Senate in the Rose Garden, and they'd line them up one after one, film portico walks, you know, with the candidate walking alongside Ronald Reagan as if they do that, you know, pretty regularly, you know? [00:18:00] And these guys that -- President Reagan wouldn't know them from Adam. But they got their six seconds or eight seconds of tape to use in a commercial, walking across the portico. And they would drag in candidates -- potential candidates into the Oval Office, and Reagan would say, "George -- his name is George, right? -- what -- we need you to run for Congress. We -- the country needs you." And get these guys in. And that was the most proactive that I think we'd ever seen before or since. But there's -- I've never seen an administration, Democrat or Republican, that was overly generous with their efforts for Congressional candidates. And so President Bush, I think, was no exception.

Q: What's up with the Democrats for -- and I'm thinking in particular that, first of all, nobody knows what Gore is going to do. He sort of has a presumptive [00:19:00] claim for a rematch, but he's off doing his own thing. But in October of '02, there's this vote to authorize the use of force in Iraq. And you've got a number of Democratic members of Congress who are thinking about running for President.



Does that affect their thinking about how to vote on that? I'm thinking of Kerry and Lieberman and Gephardt and...

COOK: Right. There were -- well, first Gore, and then slide over to the others. I think it's impossible for any of us to understand how horrific it must have been for Gore, losing by such a narrow margin. And where -- you know, if you lose by one or two percent you can just say, "Well, you know, shoot, there was noth--" But when you lose by that narrow margin, [00:20:00] how many times does he replay that campaign in his mind? You know, "If I'd only gone to Florida one more time... why the heck did I go to x, y, or z when I could have been going down to Florida? Why did I take a day off for debate prep when I could have spent an extra day in Florida?" You know, it's a wonder that it didn't drive the guy absolutely out of his mind, just replaying and second-guessing himself. And so I think that's a -- that had to be an enormously psychologically damaging type thing to go through. And Democrats were... I'm trying to remember -- as I remember, a lot of them were really spooked by past -- I mean, first of all, Vietnam was sort of hanging over [00:21:00] the Democratic Party. And they desperately didn't want a pre-- a replay of that. And the idea, though, of -- at the same time, the idea of not -- you know, the Democrats that voted against the first Persian Gulf War, they thought they were really, really exposed. And then the country went into a recession right back in '91, and President George H. W. Bush's numbers went way down. And so the Democrats who had voted against the first Persian Gulf War kind of got off the hook, and they never paid a price for being wrong on the first Persian Gulf War. But they knew that they escaped a bullet. And so with the second one, the second war with Iraq, they were really, really scared [00:22:00] about getting burned on this. And you know, there were stories that on the way to the -- Senator Paul Wellstone's funeral of Senator Kerry telling other senators that so-and-so, one of his advisers, recommended that I vote for the war. And, I mean, there was -- you know, they were like a football wide receiver hearing footsteps after getting their clock cleaned. There was a lot of that. And meanwhile, there were a lot of generals that were sending off, particularly privately, a lot of signals that maybe this wasn't such a great idea. So these Democrats were really between a rock and a hard place, and a lot of them ended up voting [00:23:00] for the war despite having very serious misgivings about it. But I think it was more politics than it was anything else.

Q: Meanwhile, John Dean is --

COOK: Howard Dean.

Q: -- Howard Dean, thank you, from Vermont --



COOK: Yup.

Q: -- is out there running. And even before, I think, the war became -- the Iraq war became an issue.

COOK: The thing that always struck me as odd about Howard Dean is that you'd go back and look at his tenure as governor; now, I met him when he was actually chairman one term of the Democrat Governors Association. He was a very, very moderate governor. He had -- I mean, by Democrat -- New England Democratic standards, which admittedly is on the curve -- but he was about as pro-business as a Democratic governor as New England ever is. And, you know, balanced the budget umpty-ump times, [00:24:00] and liberals in the state didn't particularly like him. So that when he decided to run specifically as an anti-war candidate and sort of a modern-day Gene McCarthy when he could have run as a centrist governor who happens to think the war's a bad idea, but instead running as a modern-day Gene McCarthy -- I kind of wonder if he had run the first way as opposed to the second way, whether he would have done a lot better. He would have come across as a lot less threatening if he was a moderate that just thought the war was not a good idea. So I think that the Dean campaign made a mistake, not in his opposition to the war, but in [00:25:00] turning it into a crusade rather than a reasonable difference of opinion. But from a Democratic governor of the Bill Clinton sort of wing of the Democratic Party who happens to be against the war in Iraq, I think that would have been much, much, much smarter and would have paid off for him in the long haul.

Q: He was out there pretty much by himself for a while, and I don't know that this was anything he had ever done before, but he certainly bought into the idea that the Internet could be put to political uses that nobody --

COOK: Yeah.

Q: -- had ever imagined up to that time.

COOK: Yeah, Howard Dean -- you know, I'd say Bush campaign '04 but also Dean campaign '04, and then after -- after Kerry won the nomination, I think they started sort of building on what Howard Dean [00:26:00] had done. And -- so that -- again, this '04 election, whether you're looking at the Bush campaign, whether you're looking at the Dean campaign, or for that matter the Kerry campaign, was breaking real new ground in terms of what campaigns were going to look like in the future.

Q: Let's talk about the leading Democratic candidates. I'll just say their name and you react however you think would be most helpful. I want to start with the early front-runner who then ceased to be the front-runner and then went on to come back, and that is John Kerry.



COOK: You know, Kerry, in those days, just had -- seemed to have an inability to connect with people. You know, there was an aloofness, a distance that just -- he couldn't seem to get beyond. And you know, people want to -- he couldn't [00:27:00] project any sort of warmth at all. And that, I think, always held him back. Because I think people want to like their presidential candidates, and they want to bond with them. And many, many years later, I was in a couple venues where he -- with him, and one -- we got a chance to talk. And the guy was capable of being very warm and generous and, you know, where -- you know, he had that ability but just didn't project it. And in fact, in a funny way -- although John Kerry and Bob Dole are obviously very, very different people, but in private, Bob Dole is one of the funniest people you'll ever meet, and just so warm and engaging, but he always -- during his active political career, that never came through. Never, ever came through. [00:28:00] And I'd say, conversely, as a candidate, President Obama comes across as very warm and gregarious, but has very, very few good friends, very narrow circle, doesn't really seem to like to be around people. So sometimes there are just some very strong disconnects in terms of interpersonal relationships and personality: very, very big gaps between the real person and the persona that's projected. And I think that was a real problem for Kerry as well.

Q: He did a really bold thing as a candidate when he was basically running out of money because of Dean's ascendance, and that was he loaned his campaign \$6.5 million, which gave him the money he could use in Iowa to run a campaign there. Is that kind of risk-taking, so to speak, consistent with what you know of Kerry?

COOK: Well, people [00:29:00] who had watched Kerry -- I guess I started watching him when he first ran, he was lieutenant governor first running for the U. S. Senate. And you know, the joke always used to be that the most dangerous place in the world was between John Kerry and a TV camera. And you know, that he was always so nakedly ambitious that, you know, here he was finally getting his chance to run for President, and, you know, this Howard Dean guy that nobody'd ever heard of was suddenly catching on. And you know, he and his wife had the money -- why not? And, you know, he was able to keep his campaign on life support until Dean ended up self-destructing. So it turned out to be, you know, a pretty smart investment after all. But I'm sure, you know, at the time, you know, he had no way of knowing but it turned out [00:30:00] to be a pretty smart thing to do.

Q: Now Richard Gephardt.

COOK: You know, I think Gephardt -- you know, in his mind '88 was probably his year. And that was the year when he probably thought he should have won the nomination,



and had he won the nomination, who knows. He had to have been a better candidate than Michael Dukakis. So 2004 was just sort of -- I think he was trying to put it all together again and just never was able to make it work like '88. I mean, you know, '88 was probably his year. And it came and went and didn't -- everything didn't connect for him, and so it just wasn't working out.

Q: Joe Lieberman.

COOK: Well, I think Joe Lieberman had -- [00:31:00] you know, I think people respect independence to a point, but I think that independence -- that he so closely aligned himself with -- I think he created a distance that... it had a -- he created some real problems. Actually, I think I'm -- now that I'm thinking about it, I think I'm thinking more about 2008, actually. But where he -- he damaged himself with the party a great deal. He really did. And I'm not sure it was a really realistic expectation to do it. And that there's not a real place for, you know, the kind of moderation that Joe Lieberman represented.

Q: [00:32:00] And then someone who, like Dean, was kind of a surprise at how well he did was John Edwards.

COOK: Yeah. It's -- I think Edwards, you can be too slick. You can be -- I think there was just a huge -- a huge and growing inauthenticity problem. Who are you? And you're -- that whole bit where they found some outtakes off a satellite feed of him combing his hair and stuff that -- it reinforced the very worst stereotypes of Edwards. And... it was pretty bad. But I -- you know, go back and look at Iowa, he came awfully close.

Q: Now, the start of 2004, the war in Iraq is [00:33:00] becoming fodder for critics of the war. You've got a number of Democratic primary and caucuses kind of crammed into the first couple months of the year. Was there anything about that -- the change in the process that front-loaded it so much? The many, many debates among the Democrats -- any features of that primary campaign (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)?

COOK: Well, you know, we say there were a lot of debates, but, you know, compared to, you know, 2012 Republican -- I mean, there are a lot of things that we can say, and they were true in the context of, say, 2004, but in retrospect seemed less important because things got so much more so, you know, on others. I mean, it's kind of like, you know, we can talk about bitter partisanship in the Clinton administration, but heck, [00:34:00] it was nothing like the partisanship that we saw during President George W. Bush's administration, which, in turn, that paled in comparison to the kind of polarization under the Obama administration. So things getting constantly



ratcheted up. And so statements that were maybe technically accurate at that time looked somewhat more pale in retrospect.

Q: Similarly, the front-load idea, I guess, which only got worse and worse - but after Kerry won Iowa -- which, again, I think was a bold move, to get that deeply invested in Iowa, spending his own money -- after he won there, was there any way for him to lose the nomination?

COOK: I'm trying to replay in my mind kind of the sequence.

Q: Well, Iowa, New Hampshire.

COOK: Yeah. No, the thing is, after -- after the Dean -- I mean, [00:35:00] Howard Dean started faltering before the scream, and while the scream was kind of an exclamation point, it started faltering before. And I remember going to a Dean event a couple of days before the caucus, and it was in Council Bluffs, Iowa. And somebody on the Dean campaign thought it was a great idea to give all the people that had, you know, at their own expense come to Iowa from all over the country to campaign for Dean -- to give them some signature piece of clothing to show, "Here's somebody that came from Boston" or whatever. And I'm trying to remember, it was like yellow hats or red hats --

Q: Orange baseball caps.

COOK: Orange baseball caps. That's exactly right. That somebody thought that was a good idea, when [00:36:00] -- and I remember going to this rally; it was at a gymnasium in Council Bluffs, and I actually vividly remember because Peter Jennings, the ABC anchor, was there, and I remember he came over and we talked for a few minutes. But it -- and all this sea of orange hats crowded around, up front, near the stage, for Dean getting ready to speak. And I guess they saw it as solidarity, but Iowans said, "Look at all these out-of-staters intruding on our process." And the Dean campaign sort of didn't really realize that they were really antagonizing the people they needed to support -- needed their support. And a lot of times people just don't think through how certain things are going to be perceived. So that I think, you know, the Dean campaign was a little over-engineered, [00:37:00] went a little bit too far, and didn't match up with what could have been his potential. I mean, I think voters ended up going to Kerry, but it was clearly after having more seriously entertained the thought of going with Dean.

Q: Well, there are Dean people who will say that it was essentially a conspiracy -- an agreement, a consensus among the more established candidates to gang up on Dean and sort of smother his candidacy in its cradle because he was so far outside the party mainstream. Have you seen any evidence of that?



COOK: I wouldn't disagree with that. I mean, I think that the establishment found Howard Dean very threatening, and they were afraid that it could be a latter-day George McGovern and could drag the party [00:38:00] down. And you know, I mean, heck, here we are in October of -- talking in October of 2013. I hear a lot of Republicans saying the very same thing about Ted Cruz. My God, this guy could drag us down -- take a winnable election and make it not so winnable. So, oh, I think it absolutely -- but I mean, I don't think it was a conspiracy so much as an establishment that recoiled at the idea of Howard Dean, that didn't -- that thought it would be bad, and ganged up on him. You saw that in 2012 in the Republican Party. Look how the establishment was afraid of and ganged up on Newt Gingrich. You know. I mean, a lot of them knew Newt [00:39:00] very, very well. And they thought, "You know what, wow, if Newt Gingrich is the nominee, that'll be a disaster." And as a result they started going after him. Got to make sure -- you know, "Don't know who the nominee's going to be, but it really can't be Newt" was what a lot of Republican establishment people felt, and they did their best to undercut him, and it worked pretty well. I mean, that's why these candidates who go overboard baiting the establishment and running against the establishment run some real risks, because you know, usually the establishment has the last laugh, and they did with Howard Dean, they did with Newt Gingrich, and my prediction would be they will with Ted Cruz.

Q: Meanwhile, on the Republican side, Bush is facing no opposition for re-nomination. [00:40:00] Which, when you think about it, a number of recent presidents had, and it really hurt Ford, Carter, the first Bush. Clinton got through the re-nomination without a, having to fight for it --

COOK: Well, that -- oh, Clinton, yes, yes, yes.

Q: But for a president in that situation, they can raise all kinds of money for the purpose of winning the nomination, which meant that Bush had a huge war chest when Kerry was basically broke.

COOK: Yes. And let me take that two different ways. You know, the general lesson we've learned is that incumbent presidents with no nomination challenge, generally speaking, get reelected. And incumbent presidents who are challenged for their nomination generally lose. And as you say, there were -- President Ford, '76, [00:41:00] challenge from Reagan, and Senator [Edward] Kennedy's challenge to President Carter in 1980, and...

Q: Pat Buchanan.

COOK: Yeah, Pat Buchanan with President George H. W. Bush in '92, and it goes on and on.



So that -- and the way I used to look at it is, well, you couldn't tell if it was the cart or the horse: was that incumbent president so weak that they would have lost anyway but so weak that they couldn't keep an opponent out? Or did the actual challenge weaken them to the point where they weren't getting reelected? And so that's the way I -- and I think both are very legitimate points. But watching the Obama campaign in 2012, and I think this is true of '04 with the Bush campaign, is when you give the opportunity to start preparation for a general election [00:42:00] the day after one election and have four straight years of preparing for a one-day election, that is very, very, very strong. And, you know, looking at it in the context of 2012, Mitt Romney effectively won the Republican nomination third week of April. And so had a little bit of April, May, June, July, August, September, October, a few days of November to do what the Obama campaign had done for four years. And so now, while I think the first two about weakness and incumbent challenges -- I think they're both true, but also true, I think, that if you've got a White House staff and presidential reelection campaign operation that is on the ball at all with a four-year head start, [00:43:00] that is a very, very, very potent combination. And I know a lot of folks in the Bush -- you know, you look back at Obama's numbers in -- approval numbers, other numbers, in September, October, November of 2011, and they did not look like they were the numbers of a president that was going to get reelected by almost 4%. And so I think of what the Bush campaign was able to do through 2001, '02, '03, and '04 and expecting an opposition party to be able to replicate that in a matter of months, six months, seven months, whatever, that's very, very, very hard. So I think that incumbent presidents have an even more significant advantage than I ever thought before. And I always knew they had an advantage. [00:44:00]

Q: The Kerry campaign was essentially broke after he wrapped up the nomination in early March. The Bush campaign had over \$100 million, which was real money back then. But then you see the presence of these new 527 groups, the --

COOK: Swift Boat.

Q: -- the McCain-Feingold Act that passed in '02 banned soft money, so you now see a lot of the money that used to go to the parties, soft money, going into these independent organizations. And the Democrats had a number of them that got really active in the spring of '04. Is that a -- I mean, certainly your comments on the effect of that in '04 are interesting, but is this a bad phenomenon?

COOK: Well, no, I think it's horrific that you lose accountability. To me, a candidate is ultimately responsible for [00:45:00] what his or her campaign puts on the air, and has to answer for it. And these independent groups, and it doesn't matter whether



they're liberal or conservative, Democrat or Republican, it removes an accountability, and it allows for unrestrained -- things go to excessive levels. For example, you know, we remember from 1988 the Willie Horton ads that were fairly thinly disguised racist in a lot of our minds. The Bush campaign never ran that ad. Never was. It was an independent group. And I seriously doubt if President George H. W. Bush would have authorized that ad. But an outside group did it. [00:46:00] And I don't know that President George W. Bush's campaign would have been willing to run some of the Swift Boat stuff that was run by this 527. And so it's like, you know, we're used to really, really tough campaign ads, but Democrat and Republican, the truly brutal ones, the vicious ones, generally don't come from candidate committees. They generally come from third-party groups. And so, you know, in an area with a lot of excess, it's the most excessive excess. And I think it's unfortunate. But I think, though, that the Kerry campaign, even when the Swift Boat groups came after him -- and keep in mind that, [00:47:00] you know, you go right after the Democrat convention, it -- or going into the conventions, well, that whole period, John Kerry looked like he had a pretty good shot at winning. And ultimately it was very close. But their handling of the Swift Boat -- I mean, I think that, you know, here is -- in John Kerry, here is a guy who had shown, I think, very real bravery in combat, and the very thought that somebody would question his combat service, it was like, this is so audacious that he wasn't going to dignify it with a defense. And you know, that's very quaint and old-fashioned, and [00:48:00] conceivably may have cost him the presidency. Because you know, a charge that goes really unanswered for very long, it's accepted as fact. And he... wasn't willing to do that, or do it until it was too late and it had already -- you know, I think a lot of times, arguments, things, they start off as a liquid and then start to gell and then start to solidify, and then they get rock-solid. And so you have to address these things while it's still in a liquid or gelatinous state, before it gets rock-hard. And he didn't do it.

Q: Kerry, on the eve of the convention, chooses as his running mate John Edwards, who essentially had been the runner-up in the nominating contest. [00:49:00] What about that selection?

COOK: (pause) You know, at the time -- I don't know. I'm trying to remember back; it's been awhile. But I think -- I don't think a lot of people were shocked at the choice. Certainly I think Edwards would have been on most short lists. It makes you wonder how much of a due diligence was done to look at his behavior and things, but you know, it didn't come across as, like, a nutty choice, a really highly unusual choice. I think what was unusual was there was an expectation that he would be a better



debater. There was a great expectation that his experience as a trial lawyer would give him a big advantage [00:50:00] over Vice President Cheney. And it didn't. And by a lot of accounts, Cheney won the debate. So I think it didn't seem like that bad a idea until the debate, and then it's like, well, shoot, if this guy can't debate, then what the heck good is he? Because he certainly wasn't going to bring North Carolina across.

Q: That was the odd thing to me about that choice, was that Kerry didn't couple, of course, in Edwards, with some thought of breaking into the South.

COOK: Well, I think you -- I think the South -- a state's got to be ready before a Democrat can try to -- the state has to be right before a Democratic Presidential candidate can harvest it. And we're in [00:51:00] 2013 talking, but to me, when I look at Southern states, you say, OK, what is the base Democratic vote? And you look at, OK, there's x percentage of liberals and y percentage of minorities and z percentage of labor union members who tilt strongly Democratic, and in most Southern states -- you know, Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi, Louisiana, Tennessee -- most Southern states, that is what it is. But in Virginia you had had a huge influx of transplants from other parts of the country who bring other voting patterns, non-Southern voting patterns, with them, and it alters the complexion of Virginia so that now, as of 2012, Virginia's now a mid-Atlantic state. It's not a Southern state. It's gone for Obama twice in a row. [00:52:00] And North Carolina, particularly around the Research Triangle, it's had a really big influx of transplants. Not as big as Virginia, and so North Carolina has not made the full transition that Virginia has, but it's made somewhat of a transition. But it sure wasn't ripe before 2004 yet. And I would add Georgia is one of -- sort of the early part of that phase, where, you know, it's not a mid-Atlantic state, it is still a Southern state, but if the migration patterns were to continue, at some point Georgia might still become a purple state. Now, the rest of the South, pssh, it's not changing at all.

Q: Did Kerry have a better choice available?

COOK: Oh, I think there were some folks that thought that Gephardt might have been better in terms of -- with more traditional union, [00:53:00] working-class white voters that I guess they thought Edwards would identify with, but I think Edwards was way too pretty to go after sort of working-class, downscale whites. So you know, I tend to think that people vote for president, not vice president, and that a vice presidential nominee can lose you votes, but they rarely bring a lot new to the table.

Q: Now, the two conventions that year, Democrats end of July, Republicans end of



August, beginning of September -- I'll come back to that sequence in a minute, but the Democratic Convention was basically -- well, you describe it. John Kerry... reporting for duty, the whole rollout of John Kerry as a war hero... [00:54:00]

COOK: Yeah, yeah. No, I'm just kind of trying to replay it in my mind, and the famous Obama speech and -- oh, no, that was '08. Never mind. That was '08, Boston.

Q: No, that was '04.

COOK: Oh, that was '04. Yeah, right. That's right. '04.

Q: His debut.

COOK: Yeah, yeah, thank you. Thank you. Yeah, I guess my first convention was 1976, and my first Democratic convention was '72, my first Republican was '84, and I've been to all of them since. And after a while they do get together and blur -- "Now, was that San Francisco or was that New Orleans?" That sort of thing. Thank you. I don't... (pause) I'm just trying to remember what really jumped out of that. Not a lot. I'd have to go back and refresh my memory, I'm sorry.

Q: Well, that, I think, is significant, that it doesn't stand out in memory.

COOK: Well, [00:55:00] sort of looking back at conventions past, I think Republicans for a long time were a lot better at conventions than Democrats were. And the first Democratic convention that I thought was really stage-managed in a way that was comparable to Republicans was 1988. I mean, I remember going to the 1984 Republican convention in Dallas. And how it was choreographed. And that was when they did the film with Lee Greenwood singing "God Bless the USA", first time in a political context I think it was ever used. And there wasn't a dry eye in the entire hall. And '88 was the first time the Democratic convention, I thought, was really on par with the Republican convention. And now I think we're to the point where -- [00:56:00] thinking about 2008 and 2012, where I think the Democratic conventions were more impressively put on than Republicans. That, you know, we typically have sort of these -- almost like an arms race, where one side's overpowering the other and then the advantage shifts to the other side. And I think, you know, there was a period when Republicans won the presidency five times out of six. And then since then there's been a little bit of a coasting on their part, right? I do think Republicans have lost a lot of their edge. A lot of the natural technical advantages that they used to have, they don't have anymore. And that in some ways they probably just need -- probably a good thumping would do the Republican Party a lot of good, where they would go back [00:57:00] to scratch and get rid of some bad habits and eradicate some bad ideas and kind of remake. You know, after the Goldwater '64 disaster, you know, the Republican Party came back and won the



presidency four years later. After the McGovern disaster of '72, the Democrats remade themselves and came back in '76 and won the presidency with Jimmy Carter. That sometimes a party needs just a good thrashing to turn itself around.

- Q: The Republican convention that year really took out after Kerry -- Zell Miller, a Democratic (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --
- COOK: Yeah.
- Q: -- who spoke there --
- COOK: That was Philadelphia, right?
- Q: That was New York.
- COOK: New York.
- Q: So that -- and there was even --
- COOK: They're all blending together.
- Q: And it was right on the eve --
- COOK: Yes.
- Q: -- of the September 11th attacks.
- COOK: Right, right, right, right, right. Which was not coincidental.
- Q: No.
- COOK: [00:58:00] Yeah, I...
- Q: Yeah.
- COOK: It's been a long time.
- Q: Well, going into the campaign, I mean, it seemed like the polls almost never moved very far one way or the other.
- COOK: Yeah. There's a real stability there. And there wasn't... you know, and that was one of the last campaigns where I think before the advent of a lot of garbage polling that we're seeing right now of rather dubious methodology and where the barriers of entry of being able to call yourself a pollster were still pretty high then, although you were starting to see some of this. But -- and now you can just sort of see whatever you want to see. And you know, that doesn't -- 2012 obviously had different issues, different problems. [00:59:00] But yeah, you're right, it was a very stable -- very, very stable race, and you know, nobody really knew going into the last few days which way it was going to go, which made it a very exciting campaign. But that all of that spadework that the Bush campaign did -- the behind-the-scenes organizational stuff -- it really did pay off for him.
- Q: You mentioned the vice-presidential debate earlier. And you had the three presidential debates as well. Now, some people have observed about Bush, about Obama, that when presidents run for reelection, they really just don't want to have



to deal with that stuff. (laughter) I remember the first Bush-Kerry debate was a thumping for...

- COOK: There seems to be a pattern of incumbent presidents doing badly in the first debates. And [01:00:00] I think you touched on it, that you have a president who doesn't do that many press conferences, and where even in presidential press conferences it's hardly sort of taking the gloves off. And where you're not used to getting a lot of pushback from advisers. And there's all the deference that exists, appropriately, of a president. So there's this "Why do I have to do this? Why do I have to do that? I've been doing a great job as president for four years; why do I have to demean myself and stand on the stage with this clown?" I mean, I think there's a certain amount of that, and it doesn't matter which president you are. And you have to kind to get cut down to size in that first debate, and it typically happens, because [01:01:00] it was -- you know, certainly was apparent with Obama in 2012, the overconfidence, and where the challenger knows they're a challenger and knows that they've got to be very aggressive. That being passive, that being deferential isn't going to win the presidency. So I think the challengers tend to have a psychological edge in those first debates.
- Q: It was also a little weird that in two of those debates, the one with Edwards-Cheney and then one of the Kerry-Bush debates, that the Democrat brought up Mary Cheney being a lesbian. You know, that was just so jarring, and I think the Bush people were able to make a little use out of it.
- COOK: Well, it -- you know, heck, I've lived in Washington forever, so I'm hardly representative of the American people. But [01:02:00] my hunch is that a lot of people felt like that was a really cheap shot, and that you really need to leave family members out. And you had a lot of Democrats having to do a lot of explaining about why that wasn't a cheap shot. Because I guarantee you that had a Republican done that, had the shoe been on the other foot, oh, Lord, it would have been very, very, very ugly.
- Q: What do you think, then --
- COOK: And I think Cheney -- Cheney handled it very, very well. You know, I mean, and I think, you know, everybody wants a dad that's going to back them up. And he did, and I think it sort of exposed a character flaw that we later saw develop further with John Edwards. [01:03:00]
- Q: What do you think Bush's strengths and weaknesses were as a candidate?
- COOK: Well, I think the strength was that here's somebody who's clearly comfortable in his own skin. He knows who he is, wasn't really pretending to be anything else. And



you know, people thought he seemed to be kind of a regular guy. And Vice-President Gore seemed stiff, you know, formal. You could -- you know, Peter Hart, you know, the pollster, you know, a lot of times he'll ask in focus groups things like, "Who would you rather have come over for a backyard barbecue?" You know, "Who would you -- and who would you feel -- who -- if you had to carpool to work for an hour every day, [01:04:00] who would you rather carpool with?" You know, things like that that sort of peel back layers and expose what people really think. And where, you know, who you'd rather have your kid get help on homework versus who you want to spend time with and who you fundamentally trust: those are different. Those are real different. And so I think the realism was there.

I think that -- you know, and again, we're talking in 2013 -- I think that Democrats firmly believe that a lot of the attacks on President Obama have been incredibly personal and mean-spirited and totally inappropriate. But I look at [01:05:00] a lot of the attacks on President Bush in exactly the same vein. And that people tend to overlook transgressions on their side but are very quick to seize on inappropriate attacks or remarks on the other. And you know, that's why it's easy for me to sit in the middle, because quite frankly I find a lot of pretty contemptuous behavior on both sides. And it's easier to just kind of call them on each side. But I think, you know, who he was -- they had a sense of who he was. I think that was his strength. That you knew that he wasn't putting on everything. I mean, when people -- foreign policy-wise, that [01:06:00] you could agree or disagree with him, but you knew he believed in what he was doing, as opposed to doing something for -- to get political advantage. I don't think anyone ever questioned that he was convinced that there was a very good reason to go after Iraq. And you can agree or disagree with what he did, but no question, he firmly believed it.

Q: Did he have weaknesses as a candidate?

COOK: Oh, sure. I mean... (pause) Boy, we're going way back memory lane.

Q: I guess whatever weaknesses he had as a candidate would have been weaknesses he had as a president, because --

COOK: Yeah, I mean --

Q: -- he was running for the office --

COOK: -- it's the same cloth. [01:07:00] But I think he -- I think President Bush -- Governor Bush, President Bush -- sought out strong advisers and very solid people and listened to them.

Q: That's interesting, because talking about Bush earlier, the fact that he was able to



command the loyalties of the same team from 2000 to 2004 and beyond, I guess, both of his opponents -- Gore in 2000, Kerry in 2004 -- essentially had teams of hired guns.

COOK: Yeah.

Q: Not a whole lot of personal loyalty there.

COOK: And I think that reflects -- you know, you show me someone who's got people that have been with him or her from the get-go, where people have looked at this person up close and said, "You know what, I want to stick with this person." This is [01:08:00] as opposed to, you know, as you say, just hiring on whoever the latest gunslingers are. And you know, I think there's a lot to that. And I think -- I always thought that what was interesting was that in some key roles, George W. Bush had people who had never worked for any other Republican before. And Mark McKinnon doing his media -- Mark had never worked for a Republican before. He was a Democrat. You know, that -- to get someone to come -- Matthew Dowd, same thing. To get someone to cross sides of the street to work for you, that shows that some people had watched you for a long time and liked what they saw. And you know, I think that was [01:09:00] certainly the case there, where he clearly earned loyalty from people and returned it.

Q: Did Kerry have strengths as a candidate, or was his vote basically anti-Bush?

COOK: Oh, I think that that '04 campaign -- you know, in '04, certainly the '06 midterm election, very, very much -- I mean, he just sort of had, you know, for the specter of Iraq as a political issue rising. In '06 it was just in full bloom. And it was very polarizing. And I think that's why -- we were talking earlier about how for the Bush campaign, undecided voters, President Bush wasn't going to get many of those people. You know, independent voters that weren't already with him, they weren't going to come his way. And that's why it was [01:10:00] so essential for them to crank up just extraordinary turnout among Republicans, because if he had to rely on swing voters to win that election, it wasn't going to happen.

Q: Well, one group that Bush had had some success with as a governor, not so much in 2000 but really went after in 2004, was Latino voters.

COOK: Got 44% of the vote. And to me -- well, first of all, you had a candidate that could speak some Spanish and that ran original Spanish-language advertising. And in other words, advertising that was designed for Latino audiences. Well, I'll give you an example. A more modern example is 2012 Obama-Romney. Obama campaign would recruit [01:11:00] Colorado Latino leaders to cut ads for Colorado television, aimed at Latino voters, in Spanish. OK?



Q: Mm-hmm.

COOK: The Romney campaign -- up until towards the end, all of their Spanish-language ads were simply English ads that were re-dubbed into Spanish. Now, which one's going to be more effective? And I remember the first time I ever met Karen Hughes was back in their headquarters in Austin, and she was very proud of showing what they had done in the reelection campaign as governor and what they were planning to do in 2000 for going after the Latino vote. And then they amped it up much more for 2004. And this is the mistake that Republicans, I think, are making now. It's -- they don't need to win [01:12:00] the Latino vote; just don't lose it horrifically. I mean, George W. Bush got 44% of the Latino vote, and man, that was enough to -- I mean, it was enough. And now -- what did Obama get, 71% of the Latino vote? And that you can't get hammered like that if you're a Republican with the share of the minority vote getting higher and higher. And so, you know, you asked earlier about strengths and weaknesses: I think President Bush, and I'd give Karl Rove credit here too, it's -- they knew and said very clearly that the Republican Party needed to become more attractive to minority voters in general, and specifically with Latino voters. And warned, you know, "If you start pushing this immigration stuff, you're going to kill the Republican Party." Which is absolutely true. [01:13:00] And it's an argument that they temporarily won for a while, but as soon as they were off the scene, the Republican Party started going back to some of its bad habits, and you saw what happened in 2012.

Q: What's your -- thinking of some of the key people in the Bush campaign that we were referring to, but can you talk some about Karl Rove? What is it that made him such a prominent poli-- and still is, prominent political strategist?

COOK: To me you had, you know -- he's a very bright guy, but there's a lot of very bright people in politics. But I think that he became a real student in presidential elections. I mean, really started taking them apart and reverse-engineering campaigns. And I think he had put a lot more thought into -- what does it take [01:14:00] to win the presidency, then I think a lot of other presidential campaign consultants, advisers, staff had done otherwise. And I know that sounds really simple, but, you know, Karl was a direct mail consultant in Austin, Texas. And he wasn't -- you know, kind of go back some -- he wasn't a huge figure in the Republican political consulting circles. I mean, they kind of knew who Karl was, but he wasn't, "Aha, I'm running for president; I got to go get Karl Rove." No, he wasn't on any of those lists. But there he sat and studied and studied and took apart so that when he got his shot to manage a presidential campaign, boy, he did it really, really well. Because I mean, it



was something that he had done [01:15:00] in his head over and over and over again, and did it extraordinarily well. And you've got to -- you know, I think the only fault I would put out was, you know, I think -- and Lord knows he didn't get a chance to pick the title for books that were written about him, but you know, when you have books like *Bush's Brain* and people saying "boy genius" and all of that, pretty soon principals are always going to get -- that does -- that does bother him, that when any kind of staff adviser or consultant takes too high of a profile, bad things generally happen. And so other than taking on a somewhat larger profile than he probably should have -- but I thought he was fantastic in 2000 and [01:16:00] particularly in 2004. I think in 2004 -- and I'd say 2004 for Bush and 2012 for Obama -- those were very lose-able races. And had Kerry run a better campaign, President Bush might have come up short in 2004. And had Romney run a better campaign, I'm convinced that the outcome in 2012 could have been different.

Q: How about Ken Mehlman?

COOK: Ken was smart, serious. Well, still is. And it was interesting: his personality is very, very different from Karl's. And as a result, you could see sort of [01:17:00] how they made a pretty good team. And I'm throwing Jack Oliver behind Ken Mehlman, who was more the money guy. But Ken was -- Ken's very businesslike, very corporate, very well-organized, very (inaudible). You know, where you could have seen Ken as a, you know, a corporate executive in any big company. And I might have a hard time seeing Karl necessarily in that job. You know? Karl's more of an innovator and thinker and all of that, but for executing, you know, you want to have a Ken there to do the execution.

Q: And they worked together well.

COOK: Yeah. Yeah. From what I could tell, yes, very much so.

Q: Now, one difference between campaigns then and now is that in that year, for the general election, both Kerry and Bush took the public money, [01:18:00] which was \$75 million.

COOK: Back when that was real money.

Q: Back when that was real money. But the Democratic convention was four weeks earlier, so in effect the Democrats had to make that \$75 million last three months and Republicans only two months. Did you see ways in which that made a difference in terms of the quality of the campaigns they were able to run?

COOK: Well, I think it did put the Kerry campaign at a real disadvantage, and I don't think it was accidental. I mean, I think it was yet one of those things that Karl Rove 12 years earlier, 16 years earlier, 8 years earlier, was sort of looking at -- when do parties



have conventions and when is the maximum utility, and when do you -- you know, and I think he kind of gamed it out, and that the party that [01:19:00] has the last convention -- that all parties typically get a boost, and the one that comes last is more likely to have a lasting boost, and that if you had it where it was basically dropping you out at Labor Day as opposed to in the middle of the summer when not a lot of people were paying a lot of attention and people were on vacation and stuff, my guess is the genesis of that idea was long before the date of the Republican convention was announced. And that's just something that I think Karl's devious mind kind of came up with. And maybe I'm giving him too much credit, but I bet that's the case.

Q: It was Rove-ian even if it wasn't Rove.

COOK: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: There were Congressional elections going on, and historically -- I mean, back to FDR, I think, or presidents after FDR, a president's party, [01:20:00] even when he's getting reelected, tended not to do all that well in the Congressional elections. He actually tended to lose states in the Senate, at least. Bush -- well, you'll remember this better than I -- in the Congressional elections that year, the Republicans did pretty well.

COOK: Yeah, well, they held their own. Picked up -- actually picked up, what, three Senate seats and picked up two House seats, which is unusual, to have a -- given the size differential of the Senate and the House, to have a bigger difference in the Senate than the House is somewhat unusual. But the thing is that's funny about -- I mean, the Senate is always -- you always have to ask yourself what happened six years earlier, because that's where the playing -- the table is set or the playing field is set, six years earlier. So it's always a response, so that if one party has a fabulous selection one year, [01:21:00] six years later they're set up for a fall. And so -- as opposed to the House, where it's just every single time. But yeah, I think it was -- and whether you're looking at the Nixon landslide in '72 or Reagan's landslide in '84, you know, they typically are lonely landslides. And it is what it is, and that's -- part of it is the presidential campaign, they are focused on one thing: winning the presidency.

Q: There is a quote that's been attributed to Bush where he told Rove, "I don't want a lonely landslide. I don't want what Nixon had, I don't want what Reagan had --"

COOK: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

Q: "-- (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) Eisenhower." Did that translate into an effort to make it a party victory on the Bush campaign's part, rather than a solo victory?



- COOK: If they tried that, [01:22:00] it wasn't that obvious. Because, look, when you're -- when you're facing a tough, tough reelection campaign, you want to keep your eye on the ball. You want to stay focused on getting reelected. And you show me a presidential campaign in a hotly contested race that's, "Well, let's see what we can do to help out in the House, and let's see what we can do --" you know, some of these places -- maybe places that aren't going to affect the presidential campaign, you want to know -- I'll show you a campaign that's running a real risk of blowing it, if they're focused on other things. They've got one purpose, and that's to win that campaign. You know, the RNC, or if you're a Democrat the DNC, they can go off and do other things, but even those entities in a presidential year, wow. They're pretty narrowly focused down on the presidential. [01:23:00] And it's -- so to the extent they may have done it or tried to do it, it wasn't that obvious from the outside, but to be honest it's the same we've seen in all the others. I mean, you can find some folks around Democratic campaign committees that are quite annoyed that the Obama campaign did not do much at all for Democratic House and Senate candidates in 2012. And that outcome, you know, to those of us who weren't getting our news just from Fox, you know, that thing was kind of set awhile out. And they could have done more, but no, they didn't. And that's just not what presidential campaigns -- reelection campaigns do.
- Q: So which got -- [01:24:00] I think you pointed out earlier the extraordinary Republican effort to mobilize potential Republican voters and get them to the polls. Bush got something like 10 million more votes in '04 than he had gotten in 2000. Kerry got more votes than Gore, but Bush really expanded. Was that --
- COOK: And if that happened to be in a key Senate race state, or a key House district, great. But that was purely coincidental. Purely coincidental.
- Q: Bush got 286 electoral votes, which is the most that any Republican has gotten in the last six elections. I mean, you mentioned earlier that prior to '92, the Republicans had won five out of six; since then they've lost four out of six and they've lost the popular vote in five out of six. And 286 electoral votes, that's not [01:25:00] even a significant majority. In what way has the decline of the Republican fortunes in presidential elections been because of Bush, or despite Bush, or irrelevant to Bush?
- COOK: Well, I don't think it's been because or despite President Bush. I think Republicans in some ways maybe are victims of their own success. And you know, I look at where we are in 2013 and say that Republicans seem to have an echo chamber, and they're talking to themselves, and they're talking to their own voters as opposed to



swing voters. And some of that has to do with redistricting, [01:26:00] but not all of it. Some of it has to do with sort of population sorting. You know, the Democrats typically live in urban areas or college towns, and Republican voters are more spread out around. So when you've got one party's voters highly concentrated, and where they tend to run up big scores in a Congressional district or a state, and sort of weigh -- you know, once you've got one more vote than the other guy in a state or district, you know, there's no -- it's wasted. So that I think Republicans have -- they did so well on redistricting, their districts are so conservative and so white, that they've forgotten how to talk to minority voters. And the Bush campaign in 2000 and even more in 2004 had made [01:27:00] a very concerted effort to reach out to nonwhite voters. And... it's -- we're not seeing that anymore. And Republicans are paying a price for that insularity.

Q: Charlie, are there other -- well, let me ask you this. Was there any kind of mandate from that election? Did Bush have momentum from the election to enact any particular new policy or agenda?

COOK: I don't tend to believe in second-term mandates. Well, I mean, if you're reelected, people are obviously more willing to stay the course than to change horses. I think that the Bush campaign and third-party groups did a very good job of raising doubts about John Kerry [01:28:00] to the point that people just weren't -- to the extent that they may not have been happy with everything that was going on in the country. They just weren't quite willing to make that change. And so I think on the one hand it was the doubts raised about John Kerry by the Bush campaign and Bush allies, and on the other, just simply doing -- making an extraordinary effort to get an enormous turnout among Republican voters where it mattered. And those were the two central ingredients to that victory. Now, does that end result create a mandate? Not so much in my mind, but if it's your side it's a mandate, and if it's the other side, other party, it obviously wasn't. But you know, I don't think President Obama came out with a mandate out of 2012. I don't think President Bush [01:29:00] got particularly a mandate out of 2004. You know, it just sort of is what it is.

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