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| Lines in the Sand **Congressional Redistricting in Texas and the Downfall of Tom DeLay**  By Steve Bickerstaff |
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**1. The Significance of the 2003 Congressional Redistricting in Texas**

Politics*, n. A strife of interests masquerading as a contest of principles. The conduct of public affairs for private advantage.*

—*The Devil's Dictionary*, Ambrose Bierce

The redrawing of congressional district lines in Texas in 2003 was one of the most extraordinary political events of the past fifty years, the culmination of a three-year effort to increase the Republican majority in the United States House of Representatives. The significance of the outcome lay not only in its effect on the relative strength of political parties in Texas or the U.S. Congress, but also in the precedent it set for political and redistricting trends nationwide.

***Tales of Extraordinary Institutional and Personal Challenge***

The story of redistricting in Texas in 2003 presented some of the most engaging personal tales and most interesting moments in recent Texas and national political history.

To prevent enactment of a Republican plan for partisan redistricting, most of the Democratic lawmakers left Texas to break quorum (the minimum number of legislators needed to consider legislation). Fifty-one Democratic state representatives departed in secret (most by bus) on a night in May 2003 and showed up together in Oklahoma. They remained gone until it became impossible for Republicans to pass a redistricting bill in the regular session of the 2003 Texas legislature. During a special legislative session on redistricting called by Texas governor Rick Perry, a Republican, at the end of July, eleven Democratic senators rushed from the state Capitol out of concern that they were about to be locked in the Senate chamber by Republicans intent on maintaining a quorum in that legislative body. The senators flew to New Mexico and remained there for almost forty days. Perry eventually called three special sessions of the state legislature before a quorum could be restored and a redistricting plan enacted.

Persons from both political parties were caught up in these tumultuous events and were confronted with personal dilemmas that, they now claim, made the period the most difficult of their political lives. Their stories are significant for anyone who values learning from history—from the experiences and judgments of interesting people grappling with extraordinary circumstances.

***The Importance of the 2003 Redistricting to the Preservation of the Republican Majority in Congress***

In 2003 there were 229 Republicans, 204 Democrats, and 1 independent in the U.S. House of Representatives. Democrats hoped that by winning as few as thirteen congressional races from Republicans in 2004, they could achieve a voting majority in the House. The 2003 redistricting in Texas effectively killed any chance of a Democratic takeover of the Congress in 2004 because it put seven Democratic seats in jeopardy. Redistricting in Texas resulted in a net gain by Republicans of twelve seats (six seats changed from Democratic to Republican control, meaning a net gain of twelve for the Republicans) in Congress, thereby permitting the Republican Party to add to its slim majority in the House and to significantly enhance the possibility that the Republicans will be able to build a larger, long-lasting majority in Congress. Because of Republican gains through Texas redistricting, the Democrats, although gaining four congressional seats elsewhere in the nation in 2004, ended up with two fewer seats in Congress. Without the redistricting in Texas, the Republican majority in the United States House of Representatives would have dropped to seventeen (225-208). Instead, the Republican majority increased by four seats, to twenty-nine (231-202, with one independent and one vacancy).

This voting margin would have powerful implications on particular pieces of legislation or policy issues. For example, before the Texas redistricting, several very close votes determined the fate of Medicare (216-215), the Head Start program (217-216), school vouchers for schools in the District of Columbia (209-208), and President Bush's $726 million tax cut plan (initially failing by one vote, then passing by three). For each vote, the Republican House leadership tried to strictly enforce party discipline to persuade House Republicans to support the leadership's position. Only a few Republicans broke ranks. After the Texas redistricting, the Republican leadership had a cushion of eleven or twelve additional votes. Moreover, those five freshman Republican congressmen (and one incumbent Democrat who switched parties to win reelection) from Texas generally have been loyal party soldiers, toeing the Republican line because they owe their election to the party's national leadership, which pushed through the redistricting plan in Texas. For example, in 2005 all five voted with Majority Leader Tom DeLay on all major legislation votes.

This enlarged Republican margin in Congress is particularly important for congressional action on budgetary, environmental, and civil rights issues. Four of the defeated Democrats were fiscal conservatives who frequently voted against what they perceived as wasteful expenditures. All five were consistent votes for environmental protection, so their absence is likely to affect future congressional action on environmental issues. For example, in 2005 the freshman Republican congressmen joined with other Republicans to authorize changes to the Clean Air Act, a vote that passed in the House by only two votes. To some observers, one of the greatest potential implications of the Texas redistricting is the effect a lasting Republican majority may have on reauthorization of Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act in 2007. Many minority leaders nationwide have expressed concern that Republicans either will oppose extending the act or will try to weaken its effect. The outcome in Texas increases the likelihood that House Republicans will have a strong majority for taking whatever action the Republican Party leadership wants.

The 2003 redistricting plan was designed to provide noncompetitive congressional districts. It is doubtful that many of the seats will change hands again in this decade. The twenty-one-to-eleven split in the Texas delegation after the 2004 elections will likely represent a minimum Republican majority for the remainder of this decade. The most competitive district is District 17, won by Democratic incumbent Chet Edwards in 2004. This Republican-leaning district, however, is likely to elect a Republican congressman in the future, especially if Edwards does not seek reelection. Therefore, it is very possible that, by the end of this decade, the Texas delegation will consist of at least twenty-two Republicans and no more than ten Democrats.

Presidential adviser Karl Rove is generally credited with the current strategy of creating a lasting Republican majority in Congress, one equivalent to or longer lasting than the Democratic majority left as a legacy by Franklin D. Roosevelt. Successfully redistricting Texas was seen as a critical step toward this goal. Congressman Tom DeLay's aide Jim Ellis acknowledged in 2003 that Republicans wanted to use gains in Texas as part of a plan to build a thirty-to-forty seat majority in Congress, explaining, "When you've got those kinds of margins, it's going to take a national tide to sweep you out. We're looking to build a long-term majority." The Republican success in Texas in 2003 contributed significantly to that ambition.

***Marginalizing the Democratic Party***

The 2003 redistricting was significant also because it demonstrated the potential effectiveness of a long-term Republican strategy: to marginalize the Democrats as a party exclusively for losers, liberals, and racial minorities. Redistricting specifically targeted all ten Anglo incumbent Democratic congressmen from Texas. Only three of the ten survive in Congress today as Democrats. This strategy is discussed specifically in Chapter Four, but throughout the book are explanations of how the strategy evolved and how this goal was advanced.

The most obvious attempt at marginalization was the effort by Republicans to leave a Democratic Party in Texas in which, as explained by Democratic state senator Rodney Ellis, "the only elected officials left in it would be African American and Hispanic." By trying to make the official face of the Democratic Partybrown or black, Republicans are "branding" the party as one composed primarily of racial- and ethnic-minority voters. This impression is intended to increase the likelihood that undecided Anglo voters would see a racially defined Democratic Party as inhospitable to Anglo voters and officeholders. Disaffected Anglos would then gravitate toward the Republicans.

Republicans dispute whether this branding of the Democratic Party in Texas as a party of racial and ethnic minorities was a goal of redistricting, but few, if any, of them dispute that Republicans have benefited by the branding that nevertheless occurred. Democrats made racial issues the defining and public focus of the redistricting battle in Texas, unintentionally helping Republicans. Chapter Three describes how racial and ethnic minorities have historically been excluded from the political process in Texas and how recent events have left the Texas Democratic Party now represented in Congress almost solely by Hispanics or African Americans. Only three of the surviving eleven Democratic congressmen are Anglo; two of these were elected from heavily minority districts. Thus, ironically, the racial and ethnic minorities once excluded from the political process by the Democratic Party in Texas have gained control of that same party as it has become a declining, minority political party.

The 2003 redistricting further marginalized the Democratic Party by reducing the diversity, and perceived diversity, of its voices on issues such as gun control, abortion, fiscal responsibility, etc. The defeat of the targeted Democrats bolstered the Republicans' claim that they are the only party for moderates and conservatives. Four of the targeted congressmen were members of the so-called "Blue Dog Coalition," which consists of conservatives and moderates who focus primarily on balancing the budget. These Democrats often voted contrary to the majority of their party. The elimination of such moderate or conservative Democratic representatives will make it that much harder for the Democratic Party to attract the rural moderate and conservative voters who once composed its core. As Republican consultant Grover Norquist was quoted as predicting, "[N]o Texan need grow up thinking that being a Democrat is acceptable behavior."

A related effect was the likely hardening of voting patterns among conservative and moderate voters in Texas against the Democratic Party. Although Anglo voters in Texas in recent years have increasingly voted for Republican candidates in statewide races, more Texans actually continue to vote in the Democratic statewide primary than in the Republican primary. Some voters have acted more like independents, "splitting their ticket" to support some moderate or conservative Democratic candidates, particularly in local or district races. (In Texas, voters do not have to register as members of a particular party, and so can vote in either primary.) The targeted Democratic incumbents were reelected in 2002 in their heavily Republican districts precisely because of this phenomenon. The defeat of such Democratic officeholders because of the 2003 redistricting reduces the likelihood that Texans will continue to see themselves as independents capable of splitting their votes among candidates from both major parties in federal, state, or local races.

A third sort of marginalization of the Democratic Party in Texas resulted from the depletion of its leadership and influence in Congress and the national party. The ten targeted Democratic incumbents represented 128 years of seniority in Congress; two of them had each served for twenty-five years. One, Charles Stenholm, was the ranking minority member of the House Agriculture Committee. Others held ranking positions on the Transportation, Veteran Affairs, Energy and Commerce, Space, and Homeland Security committees. Several (such as long-term congressman Martin Frost) held positions of power within the Democratic Party's leadership or in organizations such as the Blue Dog Coalition (Jim Turner). With the defeat of these senior lawmakers, Texas Democrats have become less able to effectively assist persons, businesses, and organizations wanting to influence decisions in Washington. Businesses and persons thereby necessarily become increasingly dependent on Republican congressmen; this dependency will likely lead to campaign funding from these sources.

When asked about the state's loss of seniority through the replacement of the targeted congressmen with freshman lawmakers, Congressman DeLay explained that, in his view, the Democratic Party was essentially "irrelevant" in Congress today:

*They [the Democratic incumbents] may look at themselves as important. I look at them as rather irrelevant. The ranking members don't vote with the majority of Texans in almost every issue that comes to the floor. They are opposed to everything. And how can you claim to be relevant if you are opposed to everything just for opposition sake and in a partisan vein? So I don't see that as a loss to Texas at all.*

Therefore, in DeLay's view, a loss by Texas of congressional seniority in the Democratic Party was unimportant. Other Republican officials emphasized that they were likewise unworried: since the President and many important members of Congress were from Texas, they expected the state's interests to be adequately protected. Some Republicans pointed out that Texas now has the largest Republican delegation in Congress (twenty-one members, ahead of California's twenty and Florida's eighteen) and can wield more power within the controlling Republican majority.

However, not all Republicans were thrilled with losing this seniority in Congress, or with what the Republican redistricting plan meant for rural Texans. For example, Kevin McMahon, who chairs the chamber of commerce in the Republican stronghold of Lubbock, observed, "To get rid of seasoned legislators just so we can get some freshmen Republicans, I don't think that's good for Texas. Rural Texans are a minority. There isn't any court that's going to protect the rights of rural Texans." Nevertheless, despite such resistance among some of the Republican rank and file across Texas, the Republican strategy of defeating these rural Democrats and drawing districts that joined rural Texas to growing Republican suburbs went forward.

A final marginalizing effect was to leave the impression that Democratic lawmakers, and therefore the Democratic Party, were losers. The Democrats succeeded at killing redistricting at the end of the 2003 regular session by walking out of the Texas House of Representatives to break a legislative quorum. Some Republicans who otherwise were not enthusiastic about redistricting were incensed by the tactic. Others became galvanized; they felt that this embarrassing Democratic victory could not be allowed to stand. They felt that the Republican Party must "win" this showdown. Personal and partisan pride played its part on both sides.

***Ensuring Republican Control of the Texas Congressional Delegation in the Future***

The carefully designed redistricting in 2003 also is significant because it strengthened long-term the electoral position of the Republican Party in Texas and is likely to forestall the date when even the mushrooming growth of Hispanic population in the state can make a difference in the partisan makeup of the state's congressional delegation.

The 2003 redistricting allowed Republicans to gain seats that they probably will hold throughout this decade. The district boundaries are shaped so that it is unlikely that any district will gain enough minority voters to change its partisan leaning anytime soon. Areas expected to increase in Hispanic population are placed either in the already packed majority-Hispanic districts or in districts that are overwhelmingly Anglo and Republican, where the Hispanic population growth will not endanger the reelection of Republican congressmen in the foreseeable future. The one Republican congressman previously endangered by a growing Hispanic population was given a redrawn district that now is heavily Anglo and unlikely to change in the near future. Smaller African American communities throughout the state were shifted from districts where their support had been crucial to Democratic successes to heavily Republican districts, where their votes in congressional elections will be largely meaningless as long as they vote Democratic. As Republican consultant David Bositis acknowledged in 2003, "The next six years are important to Republicans although the immediate battle is for 2004."

The Anglo population in Texas is now estimated to be less than a majority; it probably was less than a majority when redistricting occurred in 2003. The Republican redistricting shaped the congressional districts in Texas so that a conservative Anglo minority (Republican activists) effectively controls election outcomes in twenty-two of the state's thirty-two congressional districts. The effect of the 2003 redistricting, however, is not limited to this decade. The redistricting puts more Republicans in Congress who, as incumbents, will be more likely to survive this decade, to have winnable districts preserved in the next round of redistricting, and to withstand challenges in the future, despite the changing ethnicity of their districts.

***A Precedent for Control of State Congressional Redistricting by National Party Leaders and Other Outside Interests***

National party figures and their allies wielded enormous influence over the Texas redistricting. The most visible of these national figures was Congressman Tom DeLay of Sugar Land, Texas. DeLay, a former state representative from Texas, was House majority leader until he was required to temporarily step aside in 2005 after being indicted for felony violations of Texas campaign-finance laws in the 2002 elections. He permanently stepped down as majority leader in January 2006. On April 4, DeLay announced that he intended to resign in June 2006. These developments are discussed in Chapter Eighteen.

At the beginning of 2003, a major redrawing of congressional districts appeared unlikely. Republicans certainly had a legitimate reason for wanting to increase their representation in the Texas congressional delegation. Texas Republicans had suffered from prior partisan redistricting by Democrats, who still held a majority (seventeen to fifteen) of the state's congressional districts, even though no Democrat had won a statewide election in Texas since 1994. Nevertheless, few Republican state officials or lawmakers had any enthusiasm for the divisive task of redrawing district lines at a time when the state legislature was already set to tackle several major state issues. Moreover, the congressional delegation was gradually but steadily changing (the number of Republican congressmen had increased from eight in 1991 to fifteen by 2003), and most of the surviving Anglo Democrats were being elected (sometimes narrowly) in congressional districts where the voters were overwhelmingly supporting Republican statewide candidates. It seemed to be only a matter of time before some or all of these surviving Democrats would be defeated. In the meantime, the Democratic congressmen enjoyed significant seniority in Congress and were supported by local elected leaders and by many constituents who otherwise voted Republican. Every major newspaper in Texas editorialized against redistricting in 2003. The few Republican lawmakers who longed to advance the Republican cause by redistricting were the exceptions. Most had little or no enthusiasm at the start of 2003 for a large-scale redrawing of congressional lines in Texas.

More than any other person, Congressman Tom DeLay was responsible for changing that lack of enthusiasm into a firm commitment on the part of Texas officials and Republican lawmakers to redraw congressional lines and help elect a Republican majority to Congress. Republicans ultimately accepted that redistricting changes would be a necessary "reorientation" to eliminate the effects of prior Democratic gerrymanders and to align the congressional delegation with a voter base that appeared strongly supportive of President George W. Bush and the policies of the Republican Party. Events in Texas became a line in the sand—a litmus test—for members of both parties.

Congressman Tom DeLay has been condemned and celebrated for his extraordinarily effective role in driving the final redistricting outcome in Texas. Individually and through the Texans for a Republican Majority Political Action Committee, he helped elect a clear Republican majority in the Texas House of Representatives in 2002, and helped his friend Tom Craddick become speaker of that House in 2003. DeLay's success in changing the Texas House from an enemy stronghold, as it was in 2001, into his closest ally in 2003 was essential to what happened with redistricting. On behalf of the Republican delegation from Texas and the national Republican Party, DeLay formulated strategy, convinced reluctant Republicans to go along with redistricting, kept state Republican leaders focused on accomplishing redistricting despite the unusual tactics of the Texas Democratic lawmakers, and decided on the partisan results to be achieved by the final district lines.

Focusing solely on Congressman DeLay, or Karl Rove, however, would be a mistake. What happened in Texas in 2003 was not a result of the influence or planning of one person, or even a handful of persons. Instead, it was driven by a much more consequential partisan movement and was one facet of a ruthless and effective quest for power by persons and groups that share a common ideology and ambition. Activists within the Republican Party and major Republican donors played a critical role in convincing reluctant Texas Republican lawmakers to go along with an aggressive partisan redistricting plan despite their own reservations and substantial public opposition. DeLay (along with his associates) provided the focal point around which this partisan movement spiraled. Given essentially unlimited power at the end of the legislative process to design whatever districting plan they desired, DeLay and his allies put aside any pretense of advancing state interests or partisan fairness and greedily sought the most partisan plan that the law would allow.

National Democratic Party and elected officials did not remain above the fray in Texas. Some observers believe that the national party ultimately "captured" the Texas state senators for the benefit of the national party and used the controversy to energize Democrats nationally at the beginning of the race for the presidency. The effect was to turn an intrastate political battle in Texas into a national cause celebre. As the media spotlight shown on the boycotting Texas senators, Democratic officials nationwide, including the men competing for the party's presidential nomination, were drawn to the light. The Texas lawmakers became celebrities who, as guests of honor at Democratic rallies across the country, were used to rally the Democratic base (especially racial and ethnic minority voters) for the upcoming presidential election. As the standoff continued, the Democratic senators increasingly focused their attacks on President George W. Bush, in what were some of the first shots fired in the presidential campaign.

***The Effect of Money***

The story of redistricting in Texas cannot be told without discussing money. The ability of Republicans to seize power in the Texas House in the 2002 elections was crucial to the ultimate success of redistricting in 2003. Three organizations, led by DeLay's Texans for a Republican Majority (TRMPAC), raised and spent more than $4.5 million in the effort to win Republican control of the Texas House. Over $2.65 million of this amount consisted of possibly illegal corporate funds that went unreported to the Texas Ethics Commission. A fourth organization (perhaps illegally) poured an estimated $2-2.5 million in corporate funds into Texas shortly before the 2002 elections to help Republican state legislative candidates and the Republican candidate for attorney general. Much of this money was generated through a web of associated lobbyists in an apparent to gain favor with Congressman DeLay.

The influence of money was also felt during redistricting itself. Some major Republican donors made it clear that any redistricting plan allowing the survival of certain Democratic congressmen was unacceptable. Republican state officials and lawmakers felt that they had no choice but to listen. These donors were driven not so much by economics as by ideology. Their clout became one of the assets available to DeLay in the quest for aggressive partisan redistricting.

***Electing the Right Republicans***

The events in Texas showed how certain persons and organizations can enforce a particular ideology by directly affecting a party's choice of candidates. For example, most of the attention given to the activities of TRMPAC has centered on its work on behalf of Republicans in the 2002 general election. However, perhaps its greatest impact was felt during the previous Republican primary, when TRMPAC screened potential candidates and supported those who best embodied Republican ideology, including showing a willingness to support tort reform and DeLay's friend Tom Craddick for House Speaker. TRMPAC subsequently endorsed particular candidates, contributed to those in tight primary races, and, along with its allies, sent mailings attackingtheir opponents. This critical involvement in the primaries changed the likely outcome of several races and ensured that the Republicans seeking election in the general election would be the "right" Republicans.

An example of this screening process: acting Lieutenant Governor Bill Ratliff was denied the Republican nomination for lieutenant governor in 2002. As the acting lieutenant governor, Ratliff was the logical person to become the Republican candidate for that office. Moreover, he had served with distinction and was very well respected by political observers and writers and by Republican and Democratic senators. However, major Republican donors and activists deemed him insufficiently partisan, so he was compelled to withdraw from the race in 2001 only days after declaring his intention to seek the Republican nomination.

The Democratic Party also expected partisan loyalty from its lawmakers and was prepared to enforce it. Only a handful of House Democrats failed to join in the boycott in May 2003. Three of them were targeted in 2004, and all three lost in the Democratic primary.

***A Textbook for Partisan Gerrymandering***

The 2003 redistricting plan in Texas was a textbook example of how parties can configure districts to minimize the voting strength of opposing groups while maximizing their own electoral opportunities. Chapters Five and Thirteen discusses how the plan masterfully used the techniques of packing, fracturing, dismantling, and destroying constituent-member relations.

Although the redistricting process in Texas lasted over six months and involved thousands of persons—including lawmakers, attorneys, legislative staffers, members of the general public, expert witnesses, local elected officials, and newspaper editorial staffs—the districts in the final plan were the product of a few like-minded persons at the very end of the process. This cabal felt free to disregard all that had gone on before in the process, and under national partisan pressures and the guidance of DeLay, was able to fashion a masterfully partisan districting plan.

***Legal Implications***

The 2003 redistricting raised several significant legal issues. It was challenged in federal court, and at the time of this writing, the case remains pending at the United States Supreme Court.

The plan was attacked as an unconstitutional partisan gerrymander. That attack was twice rejected by the federal courts and seems unlikely to succeed, given the historical dominance of the Democratic Party in Texas.

A second and more plausible constitutional attack was based on the fundamental principle of "equal representation for equal numbers of persons." This challenge raised the question whether a state or local government is free mid-decade to replace a valid election system with a new one without doing more to ensure equal representation than relying on outdated census data that it knows is wrong. In a state like Texas, with a growing and shifting population, and with a mushrooming minority population, redistricting with old census data can be used to discriminate against ethnic and racial minorities. This happened in Texas.

If upheld, the 2003 redistricting in Texas will establish a precedent for redrawing election districts at any time during a decade, despite the lack of valid population data. Officials in other states, including California, Illinois, Georgia, New York, and New Mexico, have raised the possibility of engaging in mid-decade redistricting for partisan reasons. Unnecessarily redistricting without accurate population data endangers the most basic election principle in this country—i.e., the right of equal representation for equal numbers of persons—and opens a door for racial and ethnic discrimination.

The events in Texas also demonstrate the importance of the Voting Rights Act as a constraint on partisan gerrymandering. In U.S. politics, race has become a proxy for party affiliation. Areas dominated by African American and Hispanic residents are presumed likely to vote Democratic. If unconstrained by the Voting Rights Act, Democratic-controlled legislatures in Texas would have continued to split minority communities among multiple districts to maximize the election of Democrats. In 2003, Republicans in Texas pushed (and may have exceeded) the edge of what is legally permitted under the Voting Rights Act, which compelled them to avoid blatantly reducing the number of districts in which minority voters could determine the outcome of elections (thus probably allowing Democrats to win). If unconstrained by the Voting Rights Act, Republican map drawers in 2003 easily could have reduced the number of predominately African American and Hispanic districts included in the final plan, and thereby further enhanced the number of Republicans elected to Congress. This effect of the Voting Rights Act in Texas in 2003 is evidence of the need to retain its provisions set to expire in 2007.

These legal issues are discussed in Chapter Sixteen. The Supreme Court of the United States agreed to consider challenges to the redistricting plan and heard arguments on March 1, 2006. The outcome before the Supreme Court is discussed in the Afterword to this book.

***Unusual Parliamentary Tactics***

The events in 2003 also set a precedent for the use of extraordinary parliamentary tactics to defeat disfavored legislation. Faced with a circumstance in which all of the state officers in Texas were Republican and both houses of the state legislature had Republican majorities, Democratic lawmakers realized that they had no chance of defeating the Republican redistricting plan on an up-or-down majority vote. Therefore, the Democrats relied on other tactics. One of these tactics was the much publicized walkout or boycott to deny the Republicans a legislative quorum. In the Texas Senate, Democrats relied on procedural rules forbidding consideration of any redistricting plan that lacked the support of at least two-thirds of the members of the Senate. Democrats also chose to not even try to compromise on a plan that was less egregious than the most aggressive of the Republican plans. The Democratic strategy is specifically discussed in Chapter Six, but the effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) of that strategy marks every stage of this story.

***The Judicial Process***

The 2003 redistricting in Texas tested the effect of partisanship on the fairness and impartiality of the judicial process. At least since Bush v. Gore (2000), courts have been criticized for functioning as tools of partisanship rather than agents of justice when dealing with politically important cases. State and federal courts frequently became involved with the 2003 redistricting; the political implications of each potential ruling were apparent to the judges and the participants in the case. How did the courts react? This book provides some insight.

***The Price of Hubris?***

Finally, this tale is one about the potential costs of hubris—excessive pride. When the redistricting began in 2003, Tom DeLay was at or near the height of his political power. As House majority leader, he was widely considered to be the most powerful Republican on Capitol Hill. He had acquired that reputation through the smart and sometimes ruthless use of congressional power and private money to increase the Republican majority in Congress, maintain party discipline among House Republicans, and make the lobbying community in Washington first bipartisan, then predominately Republican through the so-called "K Street Project." He used these same assets in Texas. The outcome in Texas in 2003 seemed at the time to confirm and enhance DeLay's political reputation and power. There was even some talk that adding six new Republicans from Texas would allow DeLay to become Speaker of the House.

In hindsight, however, some of DeLay's actions during 2001-2002 and 2003 were foolish. They set in motion a cascade of events that ultimately brought him down. As one Democratic state senator recently mused in an interview with me, the Texas Democratic lawmakers in 2003 were like the hunters who first threw their spears at a mammoth: they may have been squashed, but their weapons inflicted the first wounds of the many that would be necessary over time "to bring the beast down." By 2006, DeLay's seemingly invulnerable position was gone, and he found himself fighting for political survival.