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## *The Realignments Perspective*

**2** WHAT IS THE ELECTORAL REALIGNMENTS perspective, and where did it come from? As Harvey L. Schantz has noted, the idea of realigning elections surfaced in political science before World War II.<sup>1</sup> Yet everyone agrees that it was V. O. Key who crystallized and popularized the concept in his 1955 article “A Theory of Critical Elections.” Here we see the basic, trademark dichotomizing move of the realignments school—the idea of sorting American presidential elections into two categories: a few that are “critical elections,” in Key’s terminology, and a great

1. It appeared in the writings of Arthur N. Holcombe and Cortez A. M. Ewing. See Harvey L. Schantz, “Realignment Before V. O. Key, Jr.,” paper presented at the annual convention of the Southern Political Science Association, Atlanta, October 28–31, 1998.