

# **Feeling Blue and Bleeding Red: The American Ideological Cleavage**

Ben Piven

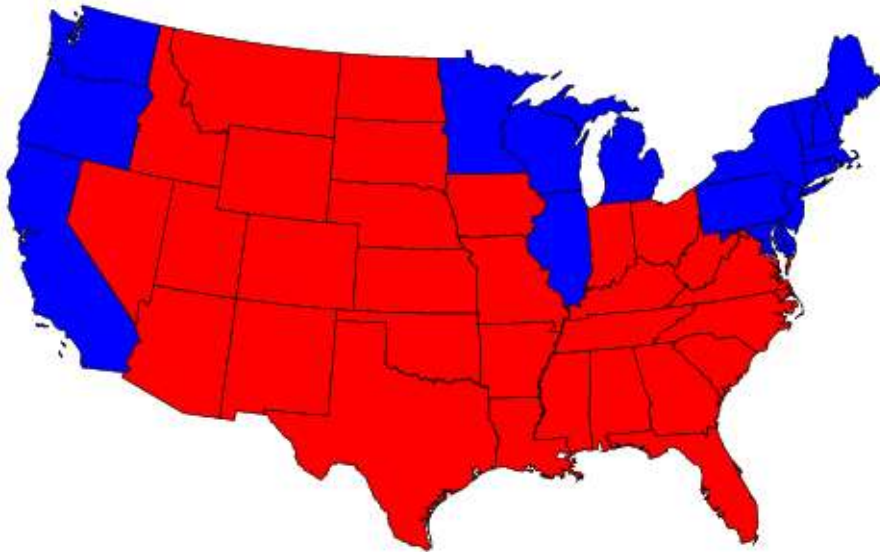
Senior Honors Thesis

University of Pennsylvania

Philosophy, Politics, Economics

Professor Rogers Smith

Spring 2005



## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Red and Blue Camps</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Demographic Disparities</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Focus on the Immaterial</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Electoral Divide</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Voting Blocs</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Values and Attitudes</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Political Culture</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>One Market Under God...or How America Learned to Love Consuming</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Cultural Doomsday or Economic Boom?</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Protocols of the Elders of the Blue States</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>The New Babylon and Economic Hegemony</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Nationalistic Piety and Empire</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Empire and Democratic Peace</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Red, White, and Blue Imperial Ideology</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Critical Theory and the Heartland</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>Rationality and the Limits of Liberty</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>Acknowledgments</b>	<b>67</b>

## Introduction

The complexities of geopolitical and cultural divisions within the United States can be analyzed within the framework of electoral distributions and foreign policy. While not comprising an actual cultural war, these divisions reflect regressive tendencies within the heartland and a burning desire to rollback the sociopolitical process and withdraw from the liberal international community. This paper will first dichotomize the red state-blue state divide and explain how the cleavage is expressed. Second, it will expose the ideological framework of the conservative backlash and its focus on cultural values rather than material concerns.

In electoral terms, the ideological divide within America reflects economic differences that are often a function of geography and race. While the blue Northeastern and Western regions of the country embrace more rapid social and political change, the red heartland tends to fear evaporation of an imaginary past and thus seeks to turn back the clock on progress. This reflects the lack of population pressures on the heartland and a fundamentally primitive outlook vis-à-vis nature and the social order. Not only is this outlook manifested by reactionary domestic politics, but it is also promoted at the farthest reaches of the universal American empire. As for Frederick Jackson Turner's notion of an anti-statist, ruggedly individualist tradition, "since the 'frontier' of America is gone, [expansionists] seek to recreate it elsewhere."<sup>1</sup> This thesis also seeks to prove the inextricable link between the militant, crusader American heartland and the compulsion to flex American imperial muscle abroad.

America's position within the international system has become more and more the hegemonic arbiter of world domination and security. The referendum of the 2004 national election confirmed a nearly even electoral split and clear differences of opinion on

---

<sup>1</sup> Lieven, Anatol. America Right or Wrong: An Anatomy of American Nationalism. Harper Collins, London. 2004, p. 189

practical/moral values. The Thomas Frank hypothesis in *What's the Matter With Kansas*, which posits that the right has swindled the working class of the heartland into supporting a regressive economic policy that benefits solely the upper class, runs parallel to the social science of Frances Fox Piven, C. Wright Mills, and Antonio Gramsci. The emergence of an ideological Republican Party, coupled with the Democratic reluctance to engage in “class warfare,” has transformed the Republican electoral edge into a pernicious brand of regressivism combined with such neoconservative international policies that one may be tempted to call this mélange regressive imperialism, as opposed to the socially progressive imperialism of the early Twentieth Century.

Popular culture has reinforced an unshakable false consciousness in the hearts and minds of ordinary Americans, for whom the mass media pumps up fears of moral decline, racial tension, and terrorist strikes. While being distracted from the sheer economic reality of the American social landscape, untold Americans have turned towards an immaterial vision of political desire, which seeks fulfillment of imaginary spiritual dreams at the expense of material advancement by means of a sensible, socially conscious government. Furthermore, the tools of critical theory become quite useful in deciphering the superstructure of American cultural hegemony as it relates to domestication of the American populace and the export of American values to the empire’s new frontier. “We are the Romans of the modern world – the great assimilating people,” declared progressive Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes.<sup>2</sup>

The political culture of the United States reflects economic and geographic differences that various interest groups have embraced over time in order to create a more polarized depiction of America’s political landscape than actually exists. Although the media steadfastly presents an illustration of America that is exclusively either red and Bush-loving or blue and Bush-loathing, the reality of national political history is relatively purple, such that moderation

---

<sup>2</sup> Charles Keeley, “The Challenge of Immigration,” *World and I Online*, October 1, 1992

and the median voter have determined the generally centrist and peaceful course of American politics since the inception of the electoral system in 1789. The proliferation of so-called special interest groups and identity politics gives the impression that the American system has become exceptionally polarized, even though the 2000 and 2004 elections were incredibly close contests. The media seem to urge on the Yeats pronouncement that the center cannot hold.<sup>3</sup>

Certain groups seem to possess a vested interest in dichotomizing the political landscape because a system of simple binary opposition creates a packaged and marketable political product. The process of modern American electoral politics allows competing interests to sell their ideas via highly complex public relations networks to their constituencies. Both ideological extremes thrive on demonizing their opposition and in entertaining the notion that there cannot be a middle ground. Despite the relatively stable course of American political history, legislative gridlock, selfish interest groups, and sensationalized media have lately produced politics that fail to live up to their progressive potential on a national level. Does American politics cater to the lowest common denominator? To what extent does fear guide the national discourse?

The militant heartland culture of the United States is inextricably linked to American imperial aggression overseas. While jingoistic, neo-conservative tendencies are certainly found in urban centers as well, the concentration of fundamentalist values in the least populated regions of the country provides a breeding ground for cultural, economic, and religious justifications for both in-egalitarian policies at home and a crusader, cowboy spirit abroad. Walter McDougall affirms the republican tradition of liberty within the American “Promised Land” but repudiates in pragmatic terms any logical extension of this exceptionalist tradition to the notion of an international Crusader State. What more, the idea of taming the wilderness and conquering that ever-expanding frontier by means of Manifest Destiny directly conflicts with certain values

---

<sup>3</sup> W.B. Yeats, “The Second Coming,” 1921

necessary for providing a sustainable, balanced economy in the long term. Despite the potential for over-generalizing, situating the two opposite electoral Americas within the geographical constructs of the post-Cold War international system is quite necessary.

The two Americas are topographically coherent and almost contiguous. One of those Americas is a perimeter, lying on the oceans or athwart the fuzzy boundary with the Canadian lakes, and is necessarily porous and outward-looking. The other America, whether montagnard or prairie, is solidly continental and landlocked, its tap roots of obstinate self-belief buried deep beneath the bluegrass and the high corn. It is time we called those two Americas something other than Republican and Democrat, for their mutual alienation and unforgiving contempt is closer to Sunni and Shia, or (in Indian terms) Muslim and Hindu. How about, then, Godly America and Worldly America?<sup>4</sup>

The distribution of political ideology within the United States follows traditional settlement patterns and the concentration of capital. In Frank's model, areas with high population densities thus are much more likely to perceive of current economic imperatives, while bastions of rightist thought engage in wishful thinking about America's future that relies on flailing neoclassical models, a duped Middle America, and continued attempts to blow the red state-blue state divide out of proportion. While the nation was somewhat polarized in the 2004 Presidential election, the vast majority of counties in the country were a shade of purple (see Figure 4). Therefore, many special-interest groups rely on divisive ideologies that seek to exaggerate the political gap in the United States because it appears politically expedient.

This paper seeks to demonstrate that the American notion of conquering nature and uncivilized peoples is borne out by recent efforts to democratize and bring so-called freedom in the form of neo-colonial occupation in Iraq. Political theory texts, sociological data, and explicit allusions by contemporary political figures will buttress the view that manifest destiny encourages the American people to globalize and promote the neo-liberal agenda of multinational corporations and American imperial culture overseas. These imperial forces

---

<sup>4</sup> Simon Schama, "Onward Christian Soldiers," *The Guardian*, November 5, 2004

function to domesticate in the postmodern era in which American hegemony sacrifices social and ecological well-being for a heightened sense of material wealth and the temptations of ideological extremism. This desire to place unbridled faith in America's grandeur and her God-given right to impose moral systems on other peoples both at home and abroad demonstrates a basic psychological tendency that translates into a cultural conflict. "The American people are more sharply and more evenly divided along party lines than at any time in modern history," argues Anatol Lieven. He adds, "This political division in turn reflects greater differences in social and cultural attitudes than at any time since the Vietnam War."<sup>5</sup>

### **Red and Blue Camps**

In order to perform an exploration of actual cultural differences present in the United States, it is best to look at the binary conception that media figures have suggested, which pits diametrically opposite halves against one another. While another civil war is hardly imminent, the current divisions reflect a certain attitude towards race and progress that dates back to the antebellum South and continues to mirror economic disparities between the centers of capital and the hinterland. The geographic spread of political allegiances in America also reflects a South that remains largely resistant to the progressive social policies supposedly imposed by Northeastern elites and the inclination to become more egalitarian, despite decades of racial advances. Figure 1 below is a depiction of the 2004 election by county, which illuminates several differences with the usual state-by-state depiction of the electoral map (cover image). The twice-victorious George W. Bush carried essentially the same counties in 2004 as he did in 2000, with a few changes in New Hampshire, Tennessee, and Ohio, among other places. Both elections were challenged by various liberal groups, on the grounds that voter fraud had occurred in various counties in Florida in 2000 and Ohio in 2004.

---

<sup>5</sup> Lieven, America, p. 5



Figure 1. <sup>6</sup>

Morris Fiorina is one political scientist who downplays the disparities between the red and blue states. In his analysis of the cultural disparities, the statistically significant differences arise from differing opinions essentially on gays, guns, and God, with the red and blue states showing fairly substantial gulfs on these subjects. However, Fiorina regards the differences mostly to be statistically irrelevant. It seems that his conclusions are not fair, given the number of millions of people that correlate to even several percentage points' difference in these culturally crucial areas. On the other hand, Thomas Frank's assessment of the hyperbolic polarization of America seems to contain more elements of truth than Fiorina's. Frank outlines

---

<sup>6</sup> USAToday.com county-by-county electoral map of the 2004 Presidential Election. Urban centers are typically blue, Democratic strongholds, while most other areas are red. The convention of labeling Democratic states blue and Republican states red emerged in the 2000 Election, when most media outlets simultaneously selected these hues.



the cultural character of each “half” of America. By quoting the tirades of media pundits, Frank demonstrates the extent to which this polarized depiction has permeated the American cultural landscape. The blue states of the Northeast and West Coast are said to be intellectual, liberal, pseudo-European, and sophisticated. The laundry list of terms that supposedly describes this half of Americans continues with such negative adjectives such as unpatriotic, snobby, wealthy, environmentalist, atheist, deracinated, inauthentic, latte-drinking, Volvo-driving, etc.

Thus, the incredibly binary dichotomy leaves rather benign traits for the red state inhabitants, at least as far as the right-wing pundits are concerned: simple, pure, faithful, and down-home. They also possess values that make them hardworking, loyal, patriotic, and humble. Lieven states that red state Americans “generally believe strongly in the American democratic and liberal Creed...that is the product of a specific White Christian American civilization, and that both are threatened by immigration, racial minorities and foreign influence.”<sup>7</sup> Frank’s and Lieven’s analyses share certain key themes, namely the ideas that right-wing politicians have hijacked the traditionally balanced political discourse and that subsequently, ordinary Americans have come to pay the price for their ideological posturing.

Frank utilizes Kansas as the prototypical state of the American heartland and the proud seat of the *vox populi*. However, this landlocked state’s distinct history contains a disproportionate amount of leftist rebellion around the turn of the century. The Populist movement emphasized the nobility of the common man and sought increased federal aid for farm programs, state ownership of railroads, and graduated income tax. Moreover, in contrast to the current climate, Frank states that there was then vociferous support for unions. However, the Kansan political climate was always rather socially conservative, with strong opposition to evolution, as well as to abortion. Frank depicts contemporary Kansas as a land in dire need of

---

<sup>7</sup> Lieven, *America*, p. 8

more progressive attitudes towards the government and labor. While agribusiness and other corporate monoliths have run rampant in Kansas, organized labor and farmers have seen their fortunes sink. According to Frank, the Mission Hills suburb of Kansas City bears witness to the tremendous increase in well-being for the people on the top of the socio-economic food chain. “Its fortunes rise and fall in inverse relation to the fortunes of ordinary working people. When workers are powerful, taxes are high, and labor is expensive,” argues Frank.<sup>8</sup> During the period between 1945 and 1978, Frank believes that labor enjoyed a healthy balance between wages and tax policy. When the opposite is true - during the Roaring Twenties and again today - the affluent suburban enclave of “Mission Hills coats itself in shimmering raiments of gold and green.”<sup>9</sup>

On the one hand, Frank observes voting patterns that seem to conflict with any rational pursuit of economic self-interest. In his view, large numbers of conservative voters simply do not grasp the extent to which they have been duped by digging an even bigger economic hole for themselves in the fast-evolving globalized economy in which blue-collar jobs have largely been phased out. The pervasiveness of free-market ideology combined with an enthusiastic embrace of moral politics creates a bizarre voter coalition that constitutes the American right wing. However, not all political scientists seem to agree how segregated and polarized this half of the voters have become. Yet, it has become increasingly obvious since the 2000 Presidential election that geographical determinants are of immense importance in comprehending the demographic influences on voting behavior.

There are a large number of graphs, maps, and tables that buttress the notion that there are concrete divisions between the red and blue regions of the country. To begin with, the data

---

<sup>8</sup> Frank, Thomas. What's the Matter With Kansas?: How Conservatives Won the Heart of America. Metropolitan Books, New York. 2004, p. 45

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

generally point to a split between a more educated, prosperous, and industrialized blue category of states and a less educated, more morally concerned category of red states. In fact, this divide exhibits dramatic disparities in attitudes about culture and religion that reflect incipient political patterns.

### **Demographic Disparities**

The first basic indicator of a tremendous gulf that splits the United States geographically is educational attainment. The percentage of residents who have completed at least a Bachelor's degree ranges from 44.2% and 35.8% in the District of Columbia and Massachusetts, respectively, to just 17% in West Virginia.<sup>10</sup> Of the 51 geographical divisions (the 50 states plus the District of Columbia), just three of the bottom twenty-nine are blue states. Thus, there is a definite concentration of more educated individuals in the blue states, which in turn leads to higher incomes. The fact that just three of the top eighteen states in educational attainment are red leads to the logical result that just four of the top eighteen states in per capita income are red. Containing higher percentages of college graduates thus compels states to vote a certain way in national elections (see Figure 2 below).

While higher income groups are generally thought to vote for Republican candidates, this conventional wisdom is not borne out by the 2004 election at the broader electoral level, when one takes into account merely the per capita income of each state. Large concentrations of affluent voters mean that progressive, modernizing, and left-leaning agendas flourish. Next, there have been fallacious graphs demonstrating the IQ differential between red and blue states that ostensibly were taken from a book called "IQ and the Wealth of Nations" by Richard Lynn and Tatu Vanhanen. These graphs did not actually appear in the book but were fabricated in order to depict the more educated states as contributing more to the wealth of the nation.

---

<sup>10</sup> Data available at the U.S. Census Bureau

Percent of Population with BA or Higher  
and Average State Per Capita Income in 1999

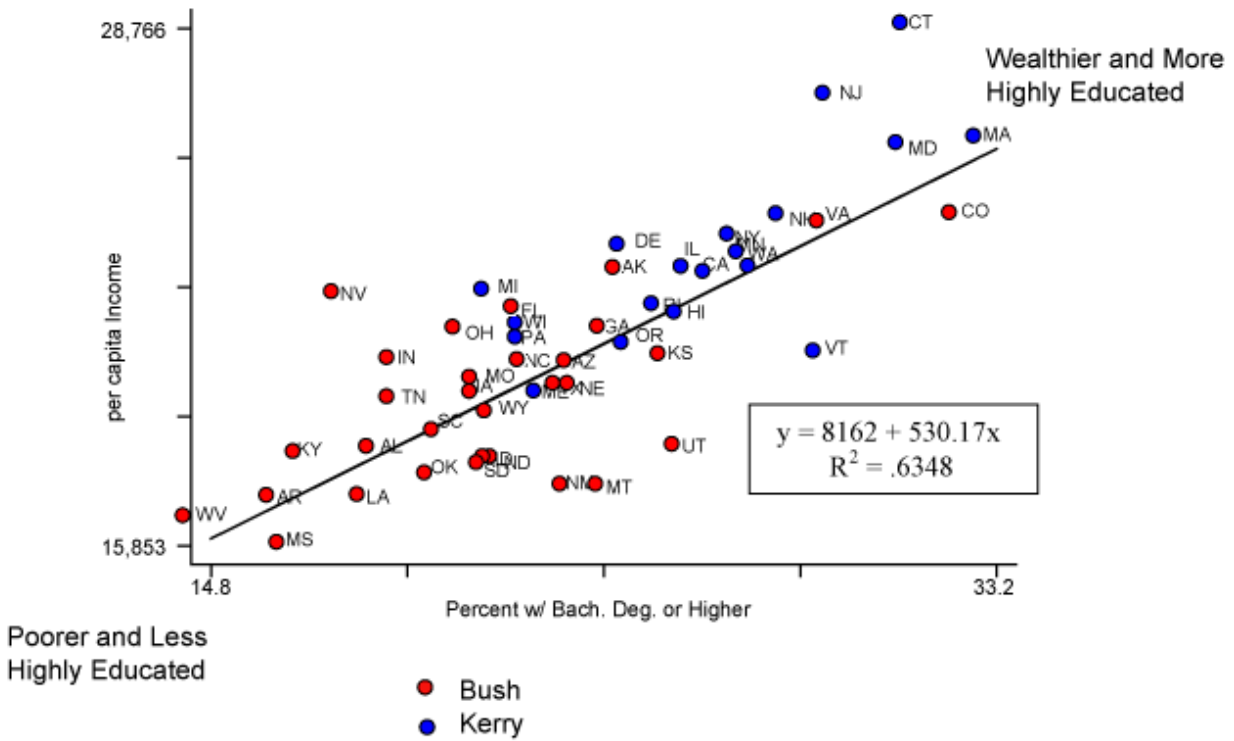


Figure 2. <sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, ACT and SAT scores do tend to be higher in the blue states, reflecting the generally higher median socio-economic status in the blue states.<sup>12</sup> So, with peak per capita incomes in the District of Columbia, Connecticut, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Maryland, and New York of over \$36,000 in 2003, one is compelled to derive some sort of political conclusion about the richer states tending bluer.<sup>13</sup> Median household incomes over the past few years have been highest in New Jersey, Maryland, and Connecticut, showing that indeed, the more prosperous parts of the nation have swung blue. Moreover, the percentage of people living

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.topalli.com/blue/>

<sup>12</sup> [www.geocities.com/blue\\_vs\\_red\\_2004/?20054](http://www.geocities.com/blue_vs_red_2004/?20054)

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce Bureau of Economic Analysis 2003 survey

below the poverty line is generally higher in redder states, with just one blue entity (the District of Columbia) in the bottom fourteen.<sup>14</sup> So, educational attainment, and thus personal income, are higher in blue states. How does a dominant ideological force emerge in either more affluent or less affluent states? The ideological derivations of demographic data take into account the huge disparity in several other moral and cultural factors. Thus, it is necessary next to examine the preponderance of moral confusion in American politics.

The divorce rate disparity between the blue and red states is perhaps the most glaring example of a moral gulf that contradicts the power of the moral majority movement. One might guess that divorce rates are lower in the states where the moralistic tradition is most politically dominant. However, the Northeastern states essentially all have the lowest divorce rates, with Massachusetts leading the pack.<sup>15</sup> Since Massachusetts is notoriously a haven for latte-drinking, Volvo-driving, morally deviant liberals, this statistic is rather significant. Furthermore, teen birth rates also are generally lower in the blue states. Of the eighteen states with the lowest teen birth rates for girls aged 15-19 in 2002, just three voted for Bush in 2004.<sup>16</sup> In addition, only two blue states were above the national average of 43 teen births per 1000. This calls into question the family values of the supposedly moral red states, whose ideological stances often appear to overcompensate for a dearth of actual behavior that conforms to their self-imposed standards.

One rather striking difference between blue states and red states indicates a tremendous demographic divide. The fertility rates of white women in blue states are dramatically lower than those of white women in red states, according to an article by Steve Sailer in *The American Conservative*, which was cited by numerous editorial pages in December 2004. Women in blue

---

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Census Bureau statistics

<sup>15</sup> William D'Antonio, "Walking the Walk on Family Values," Boston *Globe*, October 31, 2004

<sup>16</sup> National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy

states bear fewer children because of the higher cost of living and because more affluent people generally choose to have fewer offspring. The National Center for Health Statistics states that the average white woman is expected to have 1.83 babies in her lifetime. On the one hand, extremely fertile white women in Utah averaged 2.45 babies, and Bush received over 70% of the vote there in 2004. On the other hand, white women in the District of Columbia averaged 1.11 babies, while 9% of the voters chose Bush.<sup>17</sup> So, Bush carried all 19 states with the highest white fertility rates, while Kerry carried the bottom 16. Sailer asserts that the correlation between white fertility rates and percentage of voters who picked Bush was an astonishing .86. Sailer goes on to state that red state women marry earlier and begin to have kids earlier, while blue state women delay childbearing and desire to have less overall children because of higher costs of living in more densely populated areas. The red state inhabitants demonstrate higher fecundity, and abortion rates appear to correlate well with fertility, as blue states tend to have higher numbers of abortions throughout the country.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the demographic factors emerge that lead to divergent ideological positions on religious and cultural issues. Red state inhabitants generally support policies that favor more fertile and less dense populations. They also scorn abortion and its capacity to diminish growth of the nation's population.

In 2004, the geographic split between Kerry voters and Bush voters also evoked comparisons to antebellum maps, on which nearly all of the red states owned slaves. There are clear historical differences that define inward-looking, landlocked states that began with the premodern economic institution of slavery and that allowed the other half to foster more rapid economic evolution. The slave states and the territories open to slavery voted for Bush in 2004. Prior to the Missouri Compromise of 1820, the Northeastern bloc of the United States (including

---

<sup>17</sup> Steve Sailer, "The Baby Gap: Explaining Red and Blue," *The American Conservative*, December 20, 2004

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

the red states of Iowa, Ohio, and Indiana) and the West Coast had voted to be free states. The large swaths of territory in the West and the South were slave-owning. The cultural legacy of slave-owning South continues to be supremely important in the red state counterculture.

Next, according to data compiled by Ilir Topalli, the lynching rate from 1865-1965 was highest in the heartland, including many Midwestern states which are not necessarily known for racial intolerance.<sup>19</sup> This suggests that the red states most violently attempted to keep in place the system of racial apartheid that characterized the Jim Crow years. What more, the dominance of the gun culture in the red states also seems to have contributed to a higher number of deaths due to firearms, according to Topalli. In 2001, Maryland was the only blue state out of twenty-four states in which there were more than eleven deaths per 100,000 population.<sup>20</sup>

Next, the tax burden on richer states seems to buttress the perspective that the mass of red states benefits from the so-called government handouts that are usually attributed to federal spending on low-income blue state residents. So, despite the prevalence of the frontier mentality in many of the red states, which includes a profound mistrust of the government and its prying into local affairs, these heartland states proportionately benefit more than the blue states from federal expenditures. “These populations retained all the traditional European peasant fear and hatred of the state, without being exposed to the dense web of state influences, institutions, and benefits which in Europe later diminished this fear,” argues Lieven.<sup>21</sup> According to data from the Tax Foundation, just four of the eighteen states that lose money to the federal government are red.<sup>22</sup> In terms of adjusted federal expenditures per tax dollar collected, the blue states are disproportionately represented in the top ten for 2003. New Jersey, New Hampshire,

---

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.topalli.com/blue/>

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.topalli.com/blue/>

<sup>21</sup> Lieven, *America*, p. 126

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.taxfoundation.org/taxingspending.html>

Connecticut, and Minnesota receive the lowest proportional federal assistance, while only one blue state, Hawaii, is in the top ten tax freeloader category.

### **Focus on the Immaterial**

The increasingly dismal tax situation in the United States appears more and more absurd with support for tax cuts emanating from poorer states that benefit less from the cuts. Moreover, federal government revenues are at their lowest point since 1951, comprising a mere 15.7% of GDP, a decline from nearly 21% at the end of Bill Clinton's second term (see Figure 3 below).<sup>23</sup> The fiscal policies pursued by the Bush administration have driven up defense spending and diminished tax revenues by slashing income tax for the highest brackets, capital gains taxes, the estate tax, and dividend tax. Thus, the shameless promotion of business interests and the dissolution of fiscal prudence have combined to produce a climate in which budgetary issues are not given top priority. The right has hijacked the nation's budget in order to focus more on cultural issues, and Frank sees this distraction as erecting a "class divide in which class doesn't matter."<sup>24</sup>

The American right promotes the curious notion of a liberal elite running the show behind the scenes, which smacks of a conspiracy theory. Though this is not an intellectually robust idea, the significance is that economics doesn't really matter when cultural solidarity reigns supreme. The picture that emerges of the George W. Bush presidency is one of fiscal irresponsibility and a daring domestic ideology that abuses the immaterial concerns of a huge class of Americans. Rather than appealing to common sense and a traditional notion of self-interest, Bush's program relies on lofty symbolism and the institution of faith-based domestic and foreign agendas.

---

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.ombwatch.org/article/articleview/2028/1/18/>

<sup>24</sup> Frank, Kansas, p. 114



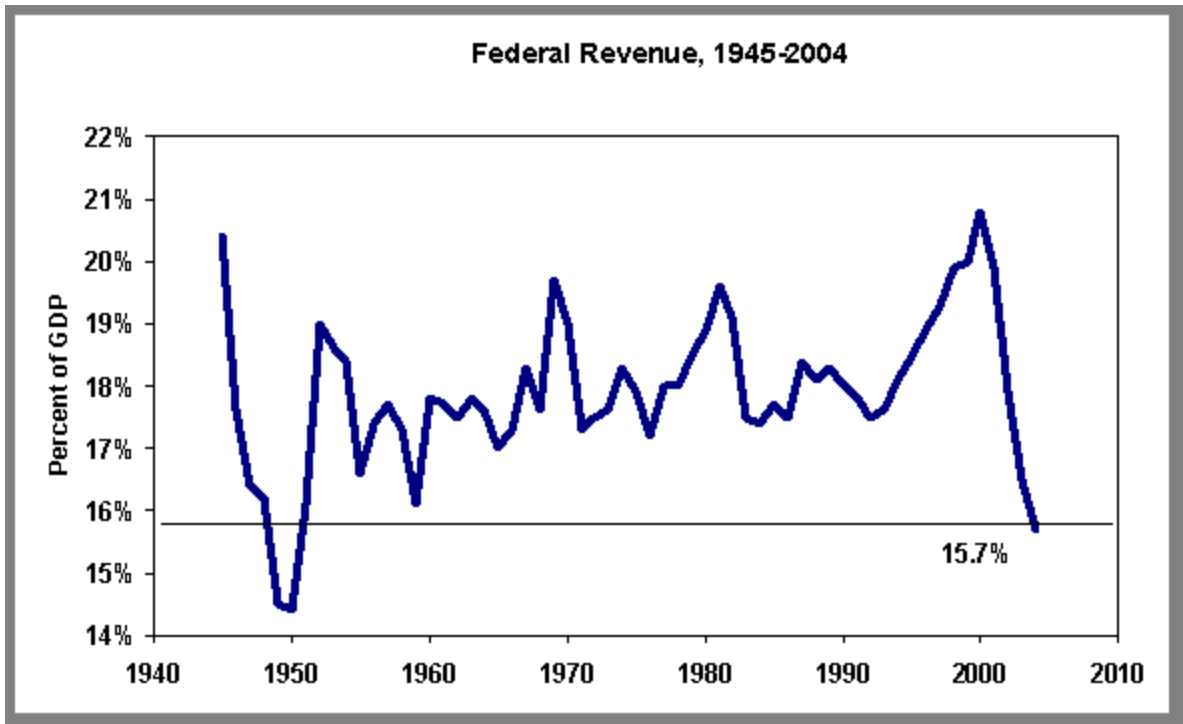


Figure 3. <sup>25</sup>

The success of such a political *kulturkampf*, while rationally rather bizarre, is quite understandable given the alienation of huge segments of the population from modernist life and their desire to protect, in the words of Daniel Bell, “[their] fading dominance, exercised once through the institutions of small-town America, over the control of social change. But it is precisely those established ways that a modernist America has been forced to call into question.”<sup>26</sup> Regardless, it is important to appreciate that this paper seeks not to condemn regressive ideological patterns but to deconstruct the backlash culture and expose its contradictions as well as its achievements.<sup>27</sup>

Let us pause for a moment to ponder this all-American dysfunction. A state is spectacularly ill served by the Reagan-Bush stampede of deregulation,

<sup>25</sup> [www.ombwatch.org/budget/pdf/2005\\_Budget\\_3.pdf](http://www.ombwatch.org/budget/pdf/2005_Budget_3.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> Lieven, *America*, p. 91

<sup>27</sup> Thomas Frank uses the term “backlash” to describe the movement of working-class voters away from traditionally working-class economic views and towards conservative cultural positions.

privatization, and laissez-faire. It sees its countryside depopulated, its towns disintegrate, its cities stagnate – and its wealthy enclaves sparkle, behind their remote-controlled security gates. The state erupts in revolt, making headlines around the world with its bold defiance of convention. But what do its rebels demand? More of the very measures that have brought ruination on them and their neighbors in the first place.<sup>28</sup>

### Electoral Divide

Consequently, the picture that emerges is of an America divided based on the Electoral College. Given the state lines that were drawn up *ab initio*, it is imperative to determine what



Figure 4.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Frank, Kansas, p. 76

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.princeton.edu/~rvdb/JAVA/election2004/> Robert Vanderbei

these somewhat arbitrary lines represent in terms of geographic distribution of economic and political resources. If state lines are ignored and one looks at the red/blue distribution based on county lines, a rather different portrait of America's political status emerges.

The 2000 Census reveals that population density is greatest in the Northeast Corridor but also is more than 250 persons per square mile in parts of the West Coast, Midwest, Southeast, Florida, and Texas.<sup>30</sup> By county, the population densities are indicative of voting patterns. When one looks at Vanderbei's Purple America map with a linear color scale to indicate voter percentages (Figure 4), the nation seems more purple than either red or blue, despite the concentrations of red in the heartland. An analysis of the effects of color on the human eye can account for why the redness may still appear more dominant. Shades of the color red generally are more alluring to the human eye than shades of blue.<sup>31</sup> Thus, due to human color psychology, the Bush-leaning regions of the United States compel Kerry voters to be more paranoid than is truly justified about the strength of the red areas.

Given that the red on the electoral map is more noticeable, it is also imperative to add that in 2004, Bush did indeed win by a margin of more than 3.3 million votes. Perhaps this does add to the red tint of the nation and demonstrate the effects of population growth in certain less dense parts of the country. Regardless, the divisive appearance of the 2004 electoral map does tend to break down when one looks at the rather purple county-by-county Vanderbei map. One realizes that even in blue states such as Maryland or Pennsylvania, a vast majority of counties went for Bush, while the major metropolitan regions went for Kerry. Therefore, the seemingly arbitrary state lines can be deconstructed to reveal the electoral potency of rural red areas within blue states. The vast majority of counties in the United States remain largely rural; thus, the total

---

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.census.gov/main/www/cen2000.html>

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.infoplease.com/spot/colors1.html>

square mileage of the counties carried by Bush was more than four times the 592,000 square miles of counties won by Kerry in 2004.<sup>32</sup> Figure 4 gives a completely different impression than the standard Electoral College map.

The widely circulated cartograms constructed by three University of Michigan academics reveal how the blue population centers and the redlands balance out on a national level when one rescales the map based on population proportionality and a color scale that includes a linear range of purple. Bush's support finds its heart in the Plains, Mountain, and Southern states, where Lieven believes nativism and white middle-class anxiety are concentrated. The cartogram below reaffirms the thesis that America is polarized geographically and that ideology arises from sheer demographic and spatial factors.

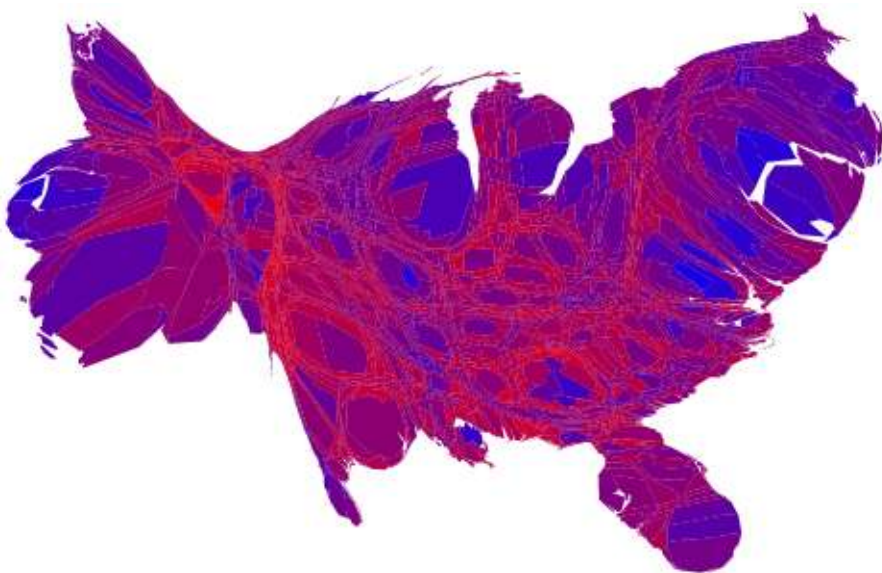


Figure 5.<sup>33</sup>

There are yet other demographic patterns that ought to be revealed to decipher the effects of geography on the electoral gulf. Do distinct voting blocs point to two “culturally distinct and politically polarized groups, each populating its own part of the country?”<sup>34</sup> Philip Klinkner

<sup>32</sup> USAToday.com election analysis by Paul Overberg

<sup>33</sup> <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~mejn/election/> M. T. Gastner, C. R. Shalizi, and M. E. J. Newman. This cartogram was created with imaging software to give counties size that is directly proportional to population.

<sup>34</sup> Klinkner, Philip A. Red and Blue Scare: The Continuing Diversity of the American Electoral Landscape. Berkeley Electronic Press, 2004. Berkeley, p. 1

believes that Figure 1 distorts the truth because counties that are barely red or blue are depicted as solidly one color. Figure 4 certainly avoids this pitfall by accounting for in-between shades and thus directs us to a more subtle, nuanced picture of how the United States is divided in ideological and cultural ways that respond predictably to the position of the United States in the international system and the unique challenges faced by various segments of the socio-economic hierarchy. While consistently based on geographical constructs, the ideological divide does in fact exist in electoral terms. Nevertheless, it is exacerbated by the media's desire to simplify and by special interest groups that benefit from divisive political messages. However, there are deep cultural gulfs that produce highly conflicting visions for the so-called new American century.

Next, Klinkner contends that most Americans live in communities where heterogeneous political views mix and meld, and he is right to the extent that most counties were not landslide counties.<sup>35</sup> In 2000, while 45% of counties were indeed landslide counties, just 36% of voters lived in these counties, since they tended to be relatively sparsely populated counties.<sup>36</sup> Klinkner further bolsters his claims by suggesting that the standard deviation of counties from the mean is not terribly high. "You would expect to see a large clump of counties on the right (Red America) and a large clump on the left (Blue America), with few in the middle," argues Klinkner. "But this is not the case. The vast majority of counties are found distributed in the center and only a very few at either end," he concludes. A graph of the standard deviation in the Democratic vote demonstrates that a peak was reached in the 1920's but that it has decreased since then, despite an increase in the 1960's.<sup>37</sup> Klinkner's third measure of overall political segregation is the index of dissimilarity, which has largely mimicked the graph of standard deviation over the course of the twentieth century. In 2000, this index stood at .21 for county dissimilarity, which means that

---

<sup>35</sup> A landslide county is defined as a county in which one candidate won greater than 60% of the vote.

<sup>36</sup> Klinkner, Red and Blue Scare, Graph 1. Percentage of Voters in Landslide Counties

<sup>37</sup> Klinkner, Red and Blue Scare, Standard Deviation graph

21% of Democrats would have to move counties in order for there to be complete political balance from county to county. This figure indicates a slight rise from a historical low in 1976, when county dissimilarity bottomed out at .145. State dissimilarity and region dissimilarity have shadowed the movements of county dissimilarity, and so Klinkner concludes that there is “no evidence to support the idea that there is little interaction between Red and Blue America.”<sup>38</sup>

Vanderbei’s maps of Purple America serve to express the unity of the American political landscape. Showing the in-between shades of color provides a more profound depiction of the color gradient of Purple America. What does the moderate purple map indicate about the distribution of ideology throughout the country? While Lieven and Frank sometimes generalize about the nature of the American right wing, their observations most often avoid excessively rhetorical language. They tend to depict the American ideological split in a nuanced manner, whereas media figures often force simplified caricatures of this gulf onto their audiences. The sparsely populated heartland reflects the solid core of support for President Bush in the 2004 election. Frank’s analytical perspective on Kansas affirms the geographical reality evident on the electoral maps, which show two blue counties in Kansas around Kansas City and a much redder region in the sparsely populated western part of the state.

Moreover, the two maps below (Figures 6 and 7) constructed by Vanderbei depict the extent to which the highly populated blue areas tower over the low Plains and Southern regions. Height on these maps indicates voter density (voters per square mile), and a clear picture emerges of how state lines are insignificant, since population density is a far more important determinant of political hue. The incredibly high blue voter density in both New York and San Francisco overshadows any red area.

---

<sup>38</sup> Klinkner, Red and Blue Scare, p. 7

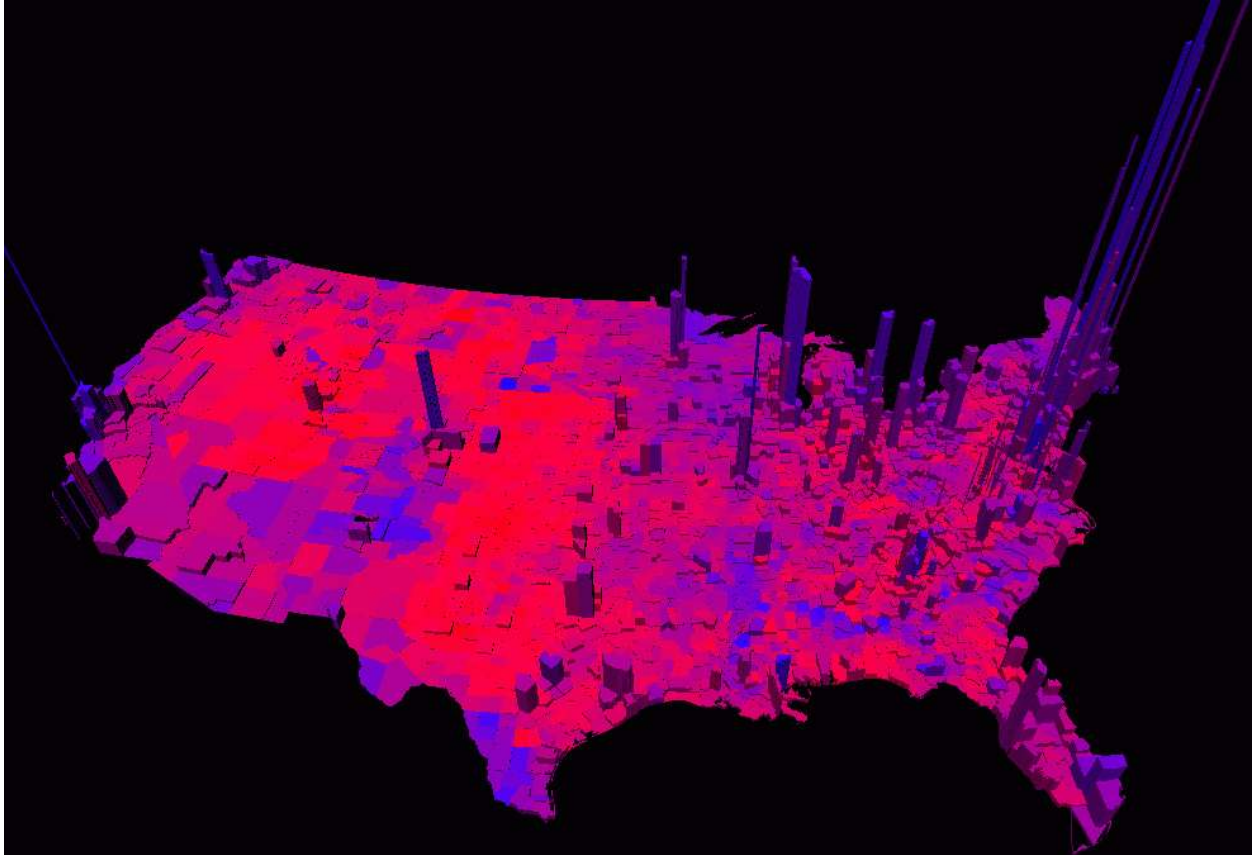


Figure 6. <sup>39</sup>

The so-called blue states are thus the states where the dense urban population outnumbers the rural population, and therefore many states are rather purple. California is perhaps the most politically diverse state on the above map because of its *mélange* of tall blue areas, flatter purple, and sparse red regions. Klinkner views states such as California as the norm, while Utah and Vermont remain exceptional.

Klinkner focuses on destroying the notion that polarized political constituencies have recently become more extreme. By emphasizing the constant shift of political allegiance, Klinkner vociferously argues that voters are consistently exposed to those of opposing political groups. To reinforce this claim, he cites the example of Iowa and Florida, which underwent

---

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.princeton.edu/~rvdb/JAVA/election2004/>

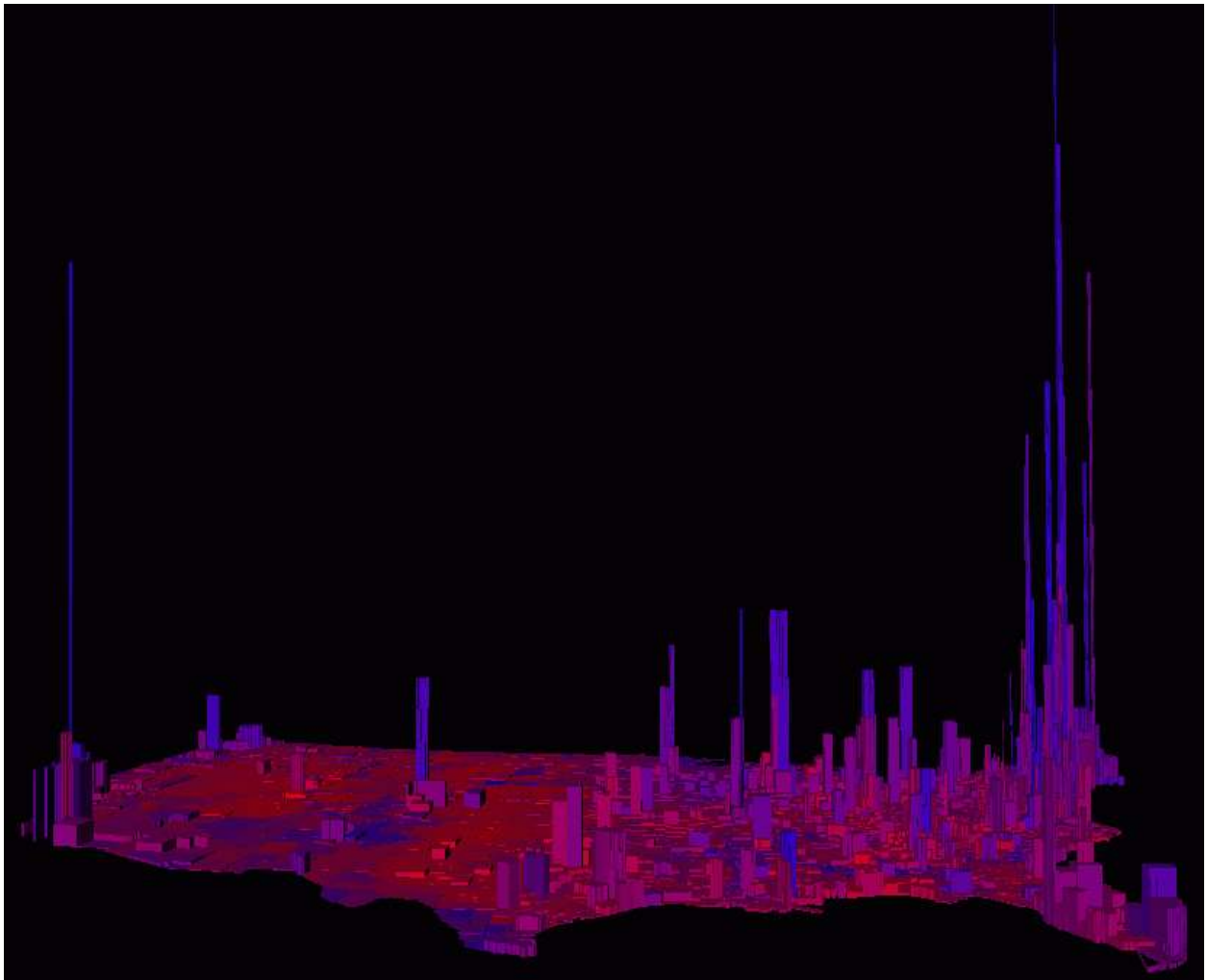


Figure 7. <sup>40</sup>

tremendous political shifts in the second half of the twentieth century. Florida was formerly a component of the solidly Democratic South but slid into the Red category following World War II. Klinkner's assertions reiterate Fiorina's hypothesis of the mythical cultural war by showing the statistical insignificance of political divisions. In declaring the ineffectiveness of binary schemes in characterizing the political landscape, Klinkner blames pundits and journalists for turning minor trends into forecasts of cultural warfare. Is political change as incremental and steady as Klinkner claims? Electoral contests have indeed remained competitive, as evidenced by the breathtakingly close 2004 Presidential Election.

---

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.princeton.edu/~rvdb/JAVA/election2004/>



Though claims about increasing party identification appear valid, the media most certainly promotes polarized portraits of the American political culture because of its marketability. Frank often mentions the simplistic yet sweeping claims of conservative commentators David Brock and Ann Coulter, who chide the defects of a high-class liberal political elite bent on minimizing the influence of the heartland, where authentic American values are ostensibly taken seriously and where the thunderous voice of the city is discarded for a pure expression of the American soul.

### **Voting Blocs**

In order to understand the complexity of the demographic split within American society, it would behoove one to examine the several significant demographic groups that impact upon geographic generalizations. African-American voters exert tremendous influence on the electoral map in the swaths of blue that cover the Mississippi River Delta, where “petro-chemical and other unionized industries are concentrated” and then also in the industrial and mining belt of central Alabama.<sup>41</sup> The concentration of African-American populations in other areas of the country such as the urban centers of Ohio, south Florida, and the predominantly black counties of South Carolina explain blue anomalies in otherwise conservative terrain. Black voters undoubtedly provide the blue backbone in urban centers such as Detroit, Chicago, and Washington D.C., and Kerry indeed received 89% of the African-American vote in 2004.<sup>42</sup>

Next, union membership as a percentage of total workers is lowest in twelve southern and western states that all went for Bush in 2004. Thus, states with the weakest union presence unanimously chose the more anti-union candidate, George W. Bush. These twelve states all have less than 7.1% of all workers unionized, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.<sup>43</sup> Union

---

<sup>41</sup> [www.laborstandard.org](http://www.laborstandard.org)

<sup>42</sup> *The Associated Press*, “Moral values, terrorism fears propelled Bush,” November 3, 2004

<sup>43</sup> 2000 map of union membership from [www.woodrow.mpls.frb.fed.us](http://www.woodrow.mpls.frb.fed.us)

members are the antidote to Backlash voters in Frank's conception. Economic concerns and healthcare issues are paramount to these unionized workers, who have seen their numbers decline from 38% union membership in the 1950s to approximately 9% in 2004.<sup>44</sup>

Hispanic voters comprise another group that generally defies the geographic voting patterns. In the American Southwest, both Hispanics and Native Americans create blue blocs in Texas and New Mexico, even in sparsely populated regions.<sup>45</sup> Though President Bush has undeniably made strides with Mexican-American voters, the nonwhite demographics are consistently a component of the Democratic Party's multi-faceted enterprise.

### **Values and Attitudes**

Judging by exit polls from the 2004 Presidential contest, the right seems to have voted for Bush based on moral values, fears of terrorism, and taxes.<sup>46</sup> Individuals whose top priority was moral values voted for Bush 79% of the time, while those who chose education as the issue that matters most went for Kerry by a margin of 75% to 25%. Essentially, Kerry voters focused on criticisms of Bush's first term positions on health care, education, Iraq, and the economy.<sup>47</sup> Moral issues, as compared with practical, material concerns, were highly significant to the rightist contingent in the last election. The repudiation of material interest as an impetus for voting decisions shows how rationality of pocket book must be divorced from rationality of moral compass. It is increasingly evident that Americans are more expressive of their economic ideas in their capacities as citizen consumers and that their voting decisions do not always reflect material inclinations as much cultural or psychological proclivities.

These cultural tendencies can certainly be modeled with a bell curve, though it seems the bell curve may be heavier towards the extremes than Fiorina argues. Fiorina suggests that the

---

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> 2000 U.S. Census of Hispanic Origin Persons

<sup>46</sup> *The Associated Press*, "Moral values, terrorism fears propelled Bush," November 3, 2004

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

political divide within American culture is no greater than in the past and merely reflects a bell curve on which most American are concentrated towards the center rather than towards the poles at either left or right. “Political actors seek standard of success...electoral and legislative victory, not education and enlightenment,” he argues.<sup>48</sup> Politicians certainly do rely on expedience to motivate their actions and are tempted by the ideological extremes if such positions suit their political tactics. Fiorina is correct in asserting that the American population is more moderate on average than the tiny elite caste of political actors who run the show.

Like Frank, Fiorina sees that that the culture war is largely a creation of the media used to provide entertainment value and not statistical proof of a genuine split. “The myth of a culture war rests on misinterpretation of election returns, a lack of hard examination or polling data, systematic and self-serving misrepresentation by issue activists, and selective coverage by an uncritical media more concerned with news value than with getting the story right.”<sup>49</sup> Thus, Fiorina concludes that ideological divisions based on party affiliation are usually statistically insignificant. He believes that Congress is polarized to a greater extent than the populace. The largely centrist population in his model becomes overshadowed by a few loud voices at the political extremes. Fiorina argues that the progressive-orthodox divide is an excessively dichotomous breakdown with a tremendous loss of information. He sees American democracy as creating a remarkably stable tradition engendered in the American Revolution. It seems, however, that any statistical difference in ideological terms is significant on the national level, even if this difference is a few percentage points in each category. Though they indicate neither an outright “culture war,” an impending second civil war, nor union of the blue states with

---

<sup>48</sup> Fiorina, Morris. Culture War? Pearson Longman, New York. 2005, p. ix

<sup>49</sup> Fiorina, Culture War, p. 8

Canada, the disparities are certainly indicative of a rather pronounced cleavage. Fiorina cites a number of statistics that appear to belie his own claims.

A significantly higher percentage of blue state residents than of red state residents have a favorable opinion of both Muslims and atheists (56% vs. 47%, and 37% vs. 27%, respectively).<sup>50</sup> Stances towards immigration and patriotism point to differentials of 12% and 8%, which seem highly significant when understood in the context of a nation of almost 300 million inhabitants. This statistic, if indeed accurate across the country, would indicate that a total of 18 million more people in the blue states believe that immigration strengthens our country. Predictable statistics emerge with regards to environmental protection and defense spending as well. Next, 6% more people in blue states said that we should “do whatever it takes to protect the environment,” and 7% more people in red states said that we ought to increase defense spending. Moral issues expose an even deeper cleavage, and the percentage of “Born Again” Christians in each category indicates a noteworthy cultural gap. While 45% of red state residents claim this affiliation, just 28% in blue states self-identify with this orthodox denomination. Moreover, 12% more people in red states said that religion was very important in life, and 10% fewer people in red states declared that homosexuality should be accepted by our society.

Fiorina presents statistics that he claims are insignificant in the big picture. Considering the mammoth size of American society and the propensity to export American morality to the farthest reaches of the supranational empire, these differentials are highly significant. “Reports of a culture war are mostly wishful thinking on the part of culture war guerillas, abetted by a media driven by the need to make the dull and everyday appear exciting and unprecedented,”

---

<sup>50</sup> Fiorina Culture War, p. 17

says Fiorina.<sup>51</sup> He explains the gulf in terms of polarized political alternatives rather than in terms of a polarized demographic base of citizens.

Moreover, Fiorina vastly underestimates the clear differences of opinion present in the United States of 2005, especially vis-à-vis the abortion debate and the welfare state. A more aggressive foreign policy is clearly favored by a greater number of red state inhabitants, though this will be addressed more in depth later on in this paper. The progressive vs. orthodox divide manifests itself with regards to the death penalty, the environment, taxes, and religion. Concrete differences with Europe on these issues make the red state attitudes appear pre-modern and regressive. The Bush administration's stance on the Kyoto Protocol, capital punishment, and faith baffles Old Europe. The typical European perspective is epitomized by the words of a British journalist: "Worldly America, which of course John Kerry won by a massive landslide, faces, well, the world on its Pacific and Atlantic coasts and freely engages, commercially and culturally, with Asia and Europe in the easy understanding that those continents are a dynamic synthesis of ancient cultures and modern social and economic practices."<sup>52</sup>

Next, Fiorina contradicts the claim that American attitudes are completely resistant to change. He cites gradually more tolerant perspectives on homosexuality as part of the profound, if sluggish, shift in American cultural attitudes.<sup>53</sup> So, Fiorina denies the existence of a considerable cleavage yet admits the clear shift away from economic issues to cultural ones and the fact that religious people are more Republican. He contends that economic issues render people much more ambivalent than cultural issues. Undeniably, the cleavage creates political profiteering, with ideological warfare in Congress and incessant rhetoric about judicial nominees in the media. Fiorina prefers to emphasize the polarization of the political class of officeholders,

---

<sup>51</sup> Fiorina, *Culture War*, p. 49

<sup>52</sup> Simon Schama, "Onward Christian Soldiers," *The Guardian*, November 5, 2004

<sup>53</sup> Fiorina, *Culture War*, p. 85

candidates, parties, and interest groups, despite the seemingly centrist voters. Fiorina thus acknowledges that there is increasing elite warfare between advocacy groups and their activists. In this climate, it seems that the one-dimensional spatial models and the median voter theorem do not explain the increasing role of the media and cultural forces in the explosion of propaganda from both the left and the right wings of American politics.

### **Political Culture**

The growing insignificance of traditional political ideology and the left-right spectrum confounds the typical political observer, as American economic development continues to take on an increasingly and overwhelmingly immaterial character. The immaterial nature of labor compounded with the immaterial religious concerns of the reactionary counterculture industry produce a political climate that shirks genuine fiscal and governmental responsibility in favor of a giant, entertaining spectacle of a body politic. Which aspects of American cultural and political preferences indicate actual economic needs and the promotion of distinct lifestyles in particular regions? Entrenched in the American heartland, the role of conservatism in preserving traditional morality and anachronistic cultural and national pride drives a complex machine of think tanks and pundits. The GOP coalition of big business interests, moral conservatives, and libertarians counterbalances the American left wing contingent of unions, minorities, and progressives.

Opponents of the oil war in Iraq often reject the attempted maintenance of a wasteful suburban/rural culture in which space is taken for granted and resources must be devoted towards conquering the vast expanse of physical space. A distinct psychological profile of rural life emerges that includes a regressive mentality that is necessary to survive on the untamed frontier. The values of aggression and toughness are indispensable for survival in this harsh environment.

This personal ethic translates into geopolitical possessiveness and the free-market drive to achieve a competitive edge via rash individualism and the process of taming nature. The traditional rural reality necessitated conquering forces beyond one's control and the need to *apprivoise* the savages and their territory.

Population pressure theory shows that socioeconomic development occurs in areas where population growth compels shifts in the political arrangement such that the population is better managed and can deal with external changes. Geopolitical change to the international system should force internal progress in America. Reactionary American movements resist this influence and opt for regressive stances on the death penalty, abortion, and the environment, especially when compared with the most developed industrialized nations. The Vanderbei maps of voter density demonstrate how blue states are typically blue only in and around their major metropolitan areas. Life in cities clearly generates more progressive influences and interaction with more international people and ideas. So, the more insular heartland finds itself cut off from the diverse urban climates festering with liberal ideology.

There are facets of Frank's theory that demonstrate conservative half-truths and propaganda that have shifted focus from real economic to moral issues. The neoconservative ideal in foreign policy combines with the expansionist military budget and the creation of false economic growth. The driving force behind the rightist American insurgency is fashioned as a sense of righteous paranoia and indignation. Most importantly,

The backlash imagines itself as a foe of the elite, as the voice of the unfairly persecuted, as a righteous protest of the people on history's receiving end. That its champions today control all three branches of government matters not a whit. That its greatest beneficiaries are the wealthiest people on the planet does not give it pause...an economic regimen of low wages and lax regulations. Over the last three decades, they have smashed the welfare state, reduced the tax burden on corporations and the wealthy, and generally facilitated the country's return to a nineteenth-century pattern of wealth distribution. Thus the primary contradiction

of the backlash: it is a working-class movement that has done incalculable, historic harm to working-class people...Having rolled back the landmark economic reforms of the sixties (the war on poverty) and those of the thirties (labor law, agricultural price supports, banking regulation), its leaders not turn their guns on the accomplishments of the earliest years of progressivism (Woodrow Wilson's estate tax; Theodore Roosevelt's antitrust measures). With a little more effort, the backlash may well repeal the entire twentieth century.<sup>54</sup>

The role of the two-party system in perpetuating the ideological warfare transforms the political debate into a divisive and lopsided contest. The Republican emphasis on ideology lately has trumped the Democratic focus on pragmatic policy. In 2005, the contemporary political environment seems more accepting of such an ideologically-based party, given the Republicans currently dominant status, at least at the national level. As Nils Gilman explains, the Democrats have failed in the past two decades precisely because they have opted out of an ideological binge and have instead continued to compromise and endorse pragmatic solutions to political dilemmas, thereby earning collective monikers such as "flip-floppers."<sup>55</sup> While the Republicans attempt "to paint the Democrats as ideologically coherent liberals," the Democrats do not actually fulfill this prescription since they merely serve a number of interest groups in a tactical, pragmatic fashion. They do not harbor any sort of all-encompassing ideology and thus are unprepared to wage war with the Republican ideological apparatus, which funneled more than one billion dollars into conservative think tanks in the 1990s as part of the focused national effort to "recast the country in a radically different mold."<sup>56</sup> The anti-statist tradition on the frontier nevertheless allows for the government to legislate morality and culture, though it fears the influence of government in certain social and economic regulatory domains.

---

<sup>54</sup> Frank, Kansas, p. 6- 8

<sup>55</sup> Gilman, Nils. What the Rise of the Republicans as America's First Ideological Party Means for the Democrats. Berkeley Electronic Press, 2004. Berkeley, p. 1

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, p. 2



The Republican ideological machine has apparently filled a tremendous void left by the decline of the Cold War. This potent, multidimensional enterprise dares to roll back the progressive economic and social reforms of the twentieth century. As Gilman views the rollback, recent economic reforms exist to satisfy those business interests who always opposed the various components of the New Deal: the Social Security Act, the Wagner Act, Boulwarism, and collective bargaining.<sup>57</sup> The red states are undoubtedly more supportive of the huge reversal in the role of government, which runs with the lowest level of revenue since 1959. The Republican regime has pushed to refrain from the traditional role of income redistribution, seeking instead to implement a flatter tax that favors the wealthy. Frank assails this rollback of welfare state provisions, including Clintonian welfare reform, as part of a reactionary movement to undue much of the social progress of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The laundry list of concerns of liberal-minded opponents of this political program include the repeal of the estate tax, the capital gains tax, anti-campaign finance reform, the attempted privatization of social security, the complete deregulation of markets, and a flat income tax. Generally, Frank, Piven, and Klinkner agree on the destructive effects of the war that is waged by the crafty clergy of capitalism but is supported by so many people who see their fortunes decline as a result. Klinkner labels the backlash culture as “a society based on predatory individualism and sanctimonious moralism.”<sup>58</sup>

### **One Market Under God...or How America Learned to Love Consuming<sup>59</sup>**

The creation of an American empire as it pertains to Lizabeth Cohen’s *Consumer’s Republic* combines a politics of mass consumption with expansionist yearnings to establish a system in which unbridled consumerism trumps political or moral imperatives. Cohen argues that the vagaries of the market economy and the perennial drive to create profits guide American

---

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Gilman, *Rise*, p. 4

<sup>59</sup> *One Market Under God* by Thomas Frank was published in 2001 and attacks the alleged decline of democratic values within American-style capitalism.

society towards whatever underlying political structures will support continued consumption at the given level. Specifically referring to the suburban dream and the drive to accumulate material wealth, Cohen repudiates this American ideal for “dulling their capacity for intellectual, spiritual, and political resistance.”<sup>60</sup> There is a gulf in opinion between more urbanized, liberal voters and suburban voters on this issue. While 81% of Democrats believe that the American Dream is becoming more difficult to attain, just 53% of Republicans agree.<sup>61</sup> This statistical difference underscores the philosophical differences between typical red state and blue state voters. Furthermore, 39% of urban adults said that where they lived negatively affected their ability to achieve the American Dream, while just 19% of suburban adults echoed this sentiment.<sup>62</sup> Thus, there is ample evidence to suggest that rural, suburban, and exurban red voters are more likely to identify with the promise of American democracy and to believe that their habitat is not just authentic but also fulfills ideological stereotypes. Recalling the conspicuous consumption of Thorstein Veblen’s *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Lieven muses about the aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup> that “the primary responsibility of the average citizen for the duration of the emergency remained what it had been in more peaceful times: to be an engine of consumption.”<sup>63</sup>

The writings of Daniel Bell and Herbert Marcuse question an American society guided by elite whose interests don’t necessarily converge with those of the masses. As the masses are duped into consuming and propagating an unsustainable social and economic framework, hegemonic ideology triumphs over sound policy. “The United States had always been guided by

---

<sup>60</sup> Cohen, Lizabeth. *A Consumer’s Republic*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York. 2003, p. 10

<sup>61</sup> National League of Cities report, *The American Dream in 2004: A Survey of the American People*. Available at [www.nlc.org](http://www.nlc.org)

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Lieven, *America*, p. 24

a ‘myth of omnipotence.’ It had regarded itself as the fair-haired child of God whose large and marvelous continent would be the scene of the unfolding of His historic design.”<sup>64</sup>

The idea of a citizen-consumer, whose civic duty it is to uphold consumption patterns, ensures that “our economy keeps growing because our ability to consume is endless. The consumer goes on spending regardless of how many possessions he has. The luxuries of today are the necessities of tomorrow,” declared Jack Isidor Straus, who was Macy’s chairman during a tremendous period of suburban growth during the mid-1960’s.<sup>65</sup> The model of suburban commercialization as overcoming the inherent ugliness of the urban polity is part of a uniquely American dream world free from the anarchy, visual chaos, and urban inefficiency of older population centers. The pre-planned diffusion of suburbs that maximizes profits and creates a sense of order and serenity allows for an America that envisions itself as the city on a hill.<sup>66</sup>

Frank explains that suburban growth occurred primarily in three waves, beginning with cheap federal loans after World War II, then with white flight during the desegregation era, then again with the relocation of corporate business parks to suburban locales. The proliferation of low-density sprawl, freeways, and malls has created non-stop construction and “free-market rapture.”<sup>67</sup> In *What’s the Matter With Kansas*, affluent Johnson County is home to suburban dwellers that actually have benefited from the Republican rollbacks of regulation and government services. Pockets of affluence there are central to the quintessential red state paradise: “Cupcake land is a metropolis built entirely according to the developer’s plan, without the interference of angry proles or ethnic pols...it encourages no culture but that which increases property values; supports no learning but that which burnishes the brand; hears no opinions but those that will further fatten the cupcake elite; tolerates no rebellion but that expressed in

---

<sup>64</sup> Bell, Daniel. *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*. Basic Books, Inc, New York. 1976, p. 216

<sup>65</sup> Cohen, *Consumer’s Republic*, p 261

<sup>66</sup> Jacobs, Jane. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. Vintage Books, New York. 1961, p. 31

<sup>67</sup> Frank, *Kansas*, p. 48

haircuts and piercings and alternative rock.”<sup>68</sup> Frank believes that Kansas has fallen prey to a cattle industry that plays towns against each other to find prizes like the biggest tax abatement, pollution allowance, best bond issue, or cheapest labor. The question is why exactly are voters swindled into accepting minimal health and retirement benefits and what Frank considers the permanent breakdown of middle class life.

### **Cultural Doomsday or Economic Boom?**

This isn't the boondocks; this is the *frontier* – the land of opportunity...a veritable cowboy...out here, the businessman's century-long wand-and-tax nightmare is over. Out here he is his own master once again, a Wyatt Earp unencumbered by grandstanding aldermen or grievance-filing shop stewards or fancy intellectuals.<sup>69</sup>

The left-wing critique of the current heartland recipe for economic growth accepts what some consider to be a permanent underclass, as corporations profit from poverty and stocks go up as the power of organized labor is attenuated. Unbridled free-market capitalism and the destruction of the old system of agriculture and small-town merchants means that Archer Daniels Midland, Tyson, and Wal-Mart run rampant in Kansas. The deregulatory climate of the Reagan-Clinton era has left the farmers and workers in bad shape, and Frank vehemently believes that this directly made Kansas even redder. The cultural push towards being virtuous, shunning decadence, and resisting cultural decline has rendered Kansas a red state of landslide proportions. Yet, the social maladies that plague the state seem rationally to result from Republican-sponsored erosion of governmental regulation and social protections. “This kind of blight can't be easily blamed on the usual suspects like government or counterculture or high-hat urban policy,” argues Frank, who stresses that the culprit is clearly not the Supreme Court or Lyndon Johnson's Great Society program either.<sup>70</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> Frank, Kansas, p. 48

<sup>69</sup> Frank, Kansas, p. 54

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

The all-too-baffling story of Kansas provides an historical reversal of political will. While William Jennings Bryan and other turn-of-the-century reformers were both fundamentalist Protestants and progressives, today's fundamentalist politicians from Kansas all have superbly pro-business voting records. The perpetual desire to deregulate, dismantle government, and rollback the welfare state is upheld by religious reactionaries who "stoke the anger, keep the pot simmering, but have little to do with the practical, day-to-day uses of government power. Thus they allow the politician in question to grandstand magnificently."<sup>71</sup> This paradoxical situation has become nearly universal in the American heartland.

For decades Americans have experienced a populist uprising that only benefits the people it is supposed to be targeting. In Kansas we merely see an extreme version of this mysterious situation. The angry workers, mighty in their numbers, are marching irresistibly against the arrogant. They are shaking their fists at the sons of privilege...and while the millionaires tremble in their mansions, they are bellowing out their terrifying demands. 'We are here' they scream, 'to cut your taxes.'"<sup>72</sup>

### **Protocols of the Elders of the Blue States**

There is a strange prohibition that Frank observes on so-called class warfare. While liberals cannot insult the sanctity of big business for fear that they will be accused of stirring up class warfare, backlash theorists delight in encoding their cultural classism with euphemisms. Frank sarcastically refers to the avowed American ideal as "one market under God" and is continually mystified by the "all-American dysfunction" that drives red state inhabitants to "demand more of the very measures that have brought ruination on them and their neighbors in the first place."<sup>73</sup> The backlash theorists attack the snobbish, bourgeois liberals because of their alleged pretentiousness and lack of authenticity. This binary system of categorizing Americans relies on gross simplifications and exaggerated metaphors. One common idea holds that the

---

<sup>71</sup> Frank, Kansas, p 101

<sup>72</sup> Frank, Kansas, p. 109

<sup>73</sup> Frank, Kansas, p. 76

overworked populace has turned to a more easily comprehensible, totalizing ideological system out of necessity. An article that appeared in *Utne* described how the Bush ideology “courts primitivism” and “cocoon[s] in a scary, paranoid, regressive reality.”<sup>74</sup> Perhaps people merely seek a return to the pre-modern 19<sup>th</sup> Century when people did not feel as hurried and constantly overworked, and “lack of free time may be the ultimate moral issue.”<sup>75</sup> It is apparent that the backlash harbors the belief that oppressive employment and cultural situations arise from a conspiratorial liberal elite.

It was as though ‘good’ were enlarged in scope while ‘evil’ was diminished and all were lumped together in a single cultural heap (that is dedifferentiated) and finally excluded or extruded from the boundary of the ‘good’ self: a vivid emotionally bipolar depiction of the world.”<sup>76</sup>

Frank’s depiction of the backlash labels the authentic American majority as inherently good but menaced by a minority of oppressive liberals. The notion of a liberal conspiracy, which keeps the cabal of hyper-intellec[t]s always in power, is rather ludicrous, given that the Republicans actually control all three branches of the federal government, as well as their fair share of state legislatures and governorships. The dominating liberal menace renders conservatism a doctrine of the oppressed and downtrodden and a tool for the deception of ordinary folk who are distracted from material issues. The paradox of contemporary conservatism ensures that the right wing, while the bastion of corporate brawn, will never admit that it is truly the voice of the powerful. This sense of victimhood or underdogger[y] constitutes subversive language and undermines the dominance of the supposedly pernicious liberal media. With the new cultural grievances, material interests may be suspended. Frank believes that the

---

<sup>74</sup> Maureen Dowd, *New York Times*, November 7, 2004, as quoted in *Utne* January-February 2005

<sup>75</sup> Anjula Razdan, “Take Your Time: Why our busy nation needs to chill out,” *Utne*, January-February 2005

<sup>76</sup> Stein, Howard F. Developmental Time, Cultural Space; Studies in Psychogeography. University of Oklahoma Press, London. 1987, p. 23

goal is thus not to win, since this cultural war cannot be won.<sup>77</sup> Overall, the pattern seems to be waging cultural battles where victory is impossible, where grievances appear as nostalgically vain yearnings. Thus, Frank believes that the backlash was born to lose, although perhaps he makes this declaration because he opposes the backlash.

While the goal is to take offense and express extreme indignation in order to show solidarity with the “virtuous persecuted by the sanctimonious,” backlash theorists accuse the liberals of being profane relativists.<sup>78</sup> Resistant to the changing tide of history, the right wing ideology attempts to negate the evolution of cultural trends in order to slow pace of cultural change. The stress on cultural decline, family values, obscenity, and disrespect to national pride are hallmarks of this crusade to prevent the apparently unstoppable onslaught of liberalism. Paranoid fears dictate that the Constitution, guns, and electoral victories cannot stop the looming liberal advance by an alien, conspiratorial force. This results in a fatalism inherent in populist conservatism, which seeks to prove how liberals have total control over Middle America. This hyperbolic belief is a fallacy, given the geographic distribution of liberals (see Figure 1). However, perceived powerlessness in the face of rapid social change and even upheaval is central to the goal of the backlash - unleashing a cultural class war. Wealthy Americans can join the backlash as long as they conform to the standards of heartland authenticity.

Though it seems the aggrieved would claim that American society is divided into cultural classes that participate in some form of cultural dialectic, they vehemently deny the economic basis of social class. Frank thinks corporate conservatives are the power behind the real class system, and thus, he fails to incorporate the new cultural class system’s divisions into his system. The “erasure of the economic” in this cultural conflict is a borrowed notion from traditional

---

<sup>77</sup> Frank, Kansas, p. 109

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

leftism, which defined ordinary people as pawns within a highly deterministic universe. However, the new focus is the liberal elite that controls the means of cultural production rather than the capitalist elite that dominates the means of physical production. So, Marxist influence on the movement results in the theory of how the power of liberalism (not capitalism) is the source of evil in the world. As the transmitter of liberal bias in this equation, the media is not considered bad because it is profit-driven but because it is liberal. The jealousy of rightists arises due to a lack of control over a specific set of production capacities – namely the production of modern culture. In the new form of immaterial dominance that will be addressed later in this paper, the control over the flow of information becomes supremely important. In the backlash dichotomy, the conservative think tanks pale in comparison to the allegedly conspiratorial power of liberal Hollywood, print media, and universities.

Frank's notion of the "culture of cool" depends on the ability of big business to smooth over ideological differences, as trend-setters and the cultural avant-garde rise to positions of dominance in the new world order. The outsider status of conservative populism in this system continues, despite the typical denial that corporations are to blame for lower wages and the environmental scourge that plague the heartland. Republicans largely fail to acknowledge the reality of how business creates culture and choose to believe that the liberal conspiracy simply exists and cannot be disputed. In utter rejection of a systematic, meticulous way of thinking, the personal backlash politics unloads the indignities of everyday life onto an imaginary enemy, not the underlying material cause. The unique quality of this postmodern reactionary movement proposes a "ready-made identity" intertwined with the "narcissism of victimhood" that leaves sufferers persecuted by a hateful world with no acceptance of responsibility by the true culprits.<sup>79</sup> Frank delineates rightism much in the same psychological manner as the Unabomber's

---

<sup>79</sup> Frank, Kansas, p. 157



Manifesto does for leftism. By showing much of rightist ideology to be contrary to self-interest, Frank evokes the supremacy of fulfillment of psychological needs. Just as many affluent leftists ostensibly support the archetypal underdog because of an underlying guilt complex that runs contrary to their direct material preference, the right wing relies on psychological identification with majestic symbols and patriotic pronouncements.

The overarching respect for markets in the American consumer's republic dons the capitalist international order with pleasant adjectives - natural, organic, democratic, free – while reserving modifiers such as destructive, arbitrary, and oppressive for government. By embracing the deity of a sacred, free market Frank contends that the vast majority of the red state residents are ignoring their economic self-interest in a process of “noble self-denial; a sacrifice for a holier cause” that results in economic martyrdom and a simple explanatory system that seeks cultural turmoil.<sup>80</sup> The anti-affluent, anti-intellectual strain constitutes a sort of anti-professional movement against doctors and lawyers, or perhaps any vocation that depends upon superior knowledge. In sum, the backlash movement depends upon the “conjunction of spiritual grandiosity and humble surroundings that's quintessentially American” to produce a “self-denying righteousness...always imagining themselves closer to God by virtue of their distance from civilization.”<sup>81</sup>

As the Democrats move rightward and the left gives up liberalism and its traditional economic beliefs in order to court big business interests, they have sought to attain centrist status “by dropping the class language that once distinguishing them sharply from Republicans, they have left themselves vulnerable to cultural wedge issues like guns and abortion...whose hallucinatory appeal would ordinarily be far overshadowed by material concerns.”<sup>82</sup> While

---

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Frank, Kansas, p. 223

<sup>82</sup> Frank, Kansas, p. 245

Republicans talk about class in a coded way, Democrats appear afraid to bring it up. The backlash counterculture industry generates coded vocabulary and references to innumerable immaterial goals.

The means of cultural production drive a dialectic that generates reactionary cultural values and a visceral relation to power and machismo. While the societal superstructure and supporting ideology fight over control over information flows, this parallel universe of backlash culture emphasizes authenticity, rebellion, victimhood, and individualism. Like the opposing cultural current of commercialism, it refuses to think critically about capitalism and instead selects “pseudospiritual fulfillments” in such a paradoxical manner that “this arrangement should be the envy of every ruling class in the world.”<sup>83</sup>

### **The New Babylon and Economic Hegemony**

The alliance between cultural conservatives and neo-conservative warmongers creates the impression of a unified front in exporting American values to the unconverted heathens. Frances Fox Piven’s most recent book links the conditions of the imperial war in Iraq to a domestic agenda that extends beyond the extraction of wealth from occupied lands and in fact depends upon the extraction of wealth from ordinary Americans. In *The War at Home*, Piven demonstrates the link between the various constituencies who pushed for the war to proceed with a maximum of funding despite a minimum of support from the international community. The sociologist attempts to show why exactly the war was pursued in the face of such significant opposition. Her theory emphatically proclaims that the Iraq War marks the first occasion of serious foreign conflict involving American troops that was accompanied by a rollback of social protections at home. This effect of hoodwinking the electorate is echoed by the work of scholars

---

<sup>83</sup> Frank, Kansas, p. 249

such as Chalmers Johnson and David Harvey, who posit that the war served both to intimidate the rest of the world and to shore up new markets for capital accumulation.<sup>84</sup>

While the goal of global hegemony was certainly at the forefront of the neo-conservative strategy to invade Iraq, its attainment was part of the idealist approach to the diffusion of democratic values across the globe. The geopolitical scramble for resources discussed by Kevin Philipps or the threat to existing patterns of consumption and investment mentioned by Arundhati Roy both necessarily pertain to the overwhelming military might demonstrated by the war.<sup>85</sup> Piven stresses “the relation between the internal and external conditions of political power” and the “domestic functions of external aggression” that are central to shoring up the Bush regime’s power primarily at home, not abroad.<sup>86</sup> The military-industrial complex has attained supremacy in this task, while the bloated military budget is up 35% under Bush.<sup>87</sup> Piven specifically derides the Republican coalition of Christian fundamentalists, gun advocates, tax cutters, and libertarians and lambastes the drop in corporate tax revenues to 132 billion in 2003 from 207 billion in 2000. While the wealthy are busy lining their pockets during wartime, the domestic task of deregulation continues in five major arenas: environment, labor, education, taxes, and healthcare.<sup>88</sup>

The dubious aspect of the imperial campaign undertaken by the Bush administration in early 2003 involved the reversal of the traditional pattern of social accommodations in wartime. “In the past, these concessions have taken the form of enlarged popular political rights, and expanded government efforts to improve the economic well-being of important popular sectors,” says Piven.<sup>89</sup> The most widespread support for these rollbacks is in Frank’s beloved but

---

<sup>84</sup> Piven, Frances Fox. *The War at Home*. The New Press, New York. 2004, p. 7

<sup>85</sup> Piven, *War*, p. 9

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Robert Borosage, “Bush’s Budget Lies,” *The Nation*, February 23, 2004

<sup>88</sup> Piven, *War*, p. 101

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

perverted heartland, where the crusader spirit has turned paranoid and seeks to expand the frontier. The link between the Turner's Frontier Thesis and America's crusader spirit needs to be made more explicit. It is clear that the anti-statist tradition is most pronounced in the American heartland, where Republican strongholds currently revolt against most sorts of federal government intervention. The culture of rugged individualism that predominates in so many parts of the United States today scorns government's action that tends towards social welfare, consumer protection, and regulatory statutes. However, this anti-federal, libertarian position often overlaps with a potent, conservative crusader jihadism that advocates premodern culture, religious dogma, and the reinforcement of racial hierarchies. It seems that this strain within the American tradition has also tended to don the warmonger suit when it comes to defeating the Evil Empire, and most recently, the Axis of Evil, a metaphor that clearly turns on religious symbolism. The utilization of religious rhetoric to describe America's duty to crusade against the forces of darkness compels American armies to hasten Manifest Destiny under the tutelage of an American, neoliberal, and white deity.

### **Nationalistic Piety and Empire**

Fears of clashing civilizations remain central to the anxious nationalism of the American heartland.<sup>90</sup> The incipient brand of Wolfowitz Wilsonianism attaches Americans who are alienated from economic change to a greater good. Lieven believes that traditional Jacksonian nationalism links the South to the Plains states in opposition to the “‘parasitical’ elements of society – concentrated in the Northeast.”<sup>91</sup> As the Bible Belt identifies with Bush's invocation of “power, wonder-working power” and the “goodness and idealism and faith of the American people,” religious calls to war are particularly apt.<sup>92</sup> As a member of the religious left, Jim

---

<sup>90</sup> Lieven, *America*, p. 91

<sup>91</sup> Lieven, *America*, p. 98

<sup>92</sup> Lieven, *America*, p. 128

Wallis says: “A simplistic ‘we are right and they are wrong’ theology covers over the opportunity for self-reflection and correction. It also covers over the crimes America has committed, which lead to widespread global resentments against us.”<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, Wallis levels religious criticism at Bush’s rhetoric on international affairs:

America's foreign policy is more than pre-emptive, it is theologically presumptuous; not only unilateral, but dangerously messianic; not just arrogant, but bordering on the idolatrous and blasphemous. George Bush's personal faith has prompted a profound self-confidence in his ‘mission’ to fight the ‘axis of evil,’ his ‘call’ to be commander-in-chief in the war against terrorism, and his definition of America's ‘responsibility’ to ‘defend the...hopes of all mankind.’ This is a dangerous mix of bad foreign policy and bad theology.

In the view of many religious theorists, God’s sponsorship of this moral arbiter in the sky has blessed the American city on the hill to be a beacon of morally upright behavior and a guiding light unto the other, less advanced nations. Yet, “the new Jerusalem has almost always been imagined as a white and patriarchal Jerusalem,” declare Hardt and Negri.<sup>94</sup> Given the mythical importance of this metaphor, it is hardly surprising that the American war machine engaged in consensual minimalism during the genesis of the Iraq conflict. The waging of holy war in Iraq took a unilateralist approach that resisted any of the scruples that ought to ensure American adherence to the rule of law that it ostensibly seeks to spread across the world. The encroachment of advanced Western-style capitalism on the Islamic world is guided by the Wilsonian creed: “The United States, with some modifications, offered the best example...the civilized, meanwhile, should govern inferiors...human beings are inherently good and will do the right thing if allowed their just liberty and orderly self-government; and certain individuals and

---

<sup>93</sup> Jim Wallis, “Dangerous Religion: George W. Bush’s Theology of Empire,” *Sojourners*, September 2003

<sup>94</sup> Hardt, Michael and Negri, Antonio. *Empire*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge. 2000, p. 148

nations are bound to lead because they have been privy to, or are the embodiments of, the deeper providential purposes of history.”<sup>95</sup>

The expansionist character of this civilizing burden carries all the chauvinism of Kipling’s directives and all the high and mighty pronouncements of American progressivism, which linked Theodore Roosevelt’s domestic social welfare programs to an explicit imperial mission. The imperialist tradition that emerged as a legacy of the Monroe Doctrine and became enshrined with the Spanish-American War led William McKinley to declare: “There was nothing left for us to do but to take them all, and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them, and by God’s grace do the very best we could by them, as our fellow-men for whom Christ also died.”<sup>96</sup> George Bush is the rightful inheritor of this strain within American history that advocates exporting the moral assets of the Promised Land to distant heathen lands. Bush perhaps accidentally dropped the crusade reference just days after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.<sup>97</sup> Though White House spokesman Ari Fleischer quickly apologized for the mistake, the notion of a Western crusade throughout the Middle East evokes the clash of civilizations that indeed took place during a long holy war between Western Christendom and Islam in medieval times. Sanctioning such religious combat provided the religious analogy necessary to garner widespread support for the imminent American assault on Middle Eastern terrorists and on regimes that ostensibly sponsored terrorist activities.

In launching Operation Infinite Justice in the aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup>, the Bush administration successfully augmented public approval of its revenge strategies by providing ordinary Americans with the lofty notion that they were participating in a moral campaign that

---

<sup>95</sup> Stephanson, Anders. Manifest Destiny. Hill and Wang, New York. 1995, p. 114

<sup>96</sup> McDougall, Walter. Promised Land, Crusader State. Houghton Mifflin Company, New York. 1997, p. 112

<sup>97</sup> Scott Rosenberg, “Infinite Justice?” salon.com, September 20, 2001

was sanctified by God and that reinforced distractions from material shortcomings and redirected the focus towards an everlasting battle fought on behalf of God. Viewed as a referendum on Bush's mission to bring liberty to the oppressed peoples of the world, the 2004 Presidential election clearly vindicated the official public relations efforts of the first Bush administration. According to Lieven, 71% of Republicans describe themselves as very patriotic while just 48% of Democrats would describe themselves in this way.<sup>98</sup> This suggests that Democratic-leaning voters generally do not identify with a pompous image of America or a sacred American destiny. Bush's divinely-inspired rhetoric reminds the world that "America is called to lead the cause of freedom in the new century... Freedom is not America's gift to the world. It is the Almighty God's gift."<sup>99</sup> Thus, the 2004 referendum on Bush's wars of revenge, liberty, and empire resulted in an exoneration of such sacred edicts, at least by the redder states.

Regardless of whether America's ruling elite truly believes that God has given America permission to wage war on the infidels, the official White House public relations apparatus creates such a spectacular image of America's sacrosanct duty that the American electoral majority could not resist the bombastic symbolism.

The Spectacle manifests itself as an enormous positivity, out of reach and beyond dispute... The attitude that it demands in principle is the same passive acceptance that it has already secured by means of its seeming incontrovertibility, and indeed by its monopolization of the realm of appearances. The Spectacle is essentially tautological, for the simple reasons that its means and its ends are identical. It is the sun that never sets on the empire of modern passivity. It covers the entire globe, basking in the perpetual warmth of its own glory.<sup>100</sup>

Thus, the Bush administration has grounded its *modus operandi* in a religiously infused doctrine of privatization, liberty, and faith. What is most novel about the current president is his

---

<sup>98</sup> Lieven, *America*, p. 5

<sup>99</sup> Bush's 2004 Republican National Convention acceptance speech, as quoted by David Corn, "Bush: It's About Me and My Crusade," *The Nation*, September 3, 2004

<sup>100</sup> Debord, Guy. *The Society of the Spectacle*. Translation by Donald Nicholson-Smith. Zone Books, New York. 1995, p. 15

focus on binary systems of opposition that break down complex social realities into symbolic metaphors that appeal to ordinary Americans. Extending beyond Nye's understanding of "soft power," the American creed is embedded in intense cultural changes that have taken the world hostage. Moreover, politics in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century reflects technologies and spectacular images that propel political leaders to a newfound glory. "The notions that politicians function as celebrities and that political campaigns operate on the logic of advertising - hypotheses that seemed radical and scandalous thirty years ago- are today taken for granted," argue Hardt and Negri. They add, "Political discourse is an articulated sales pitch, and political participation is reduced to selecting among consumable images."<sup>101</sup>

American cultural exports take various forms and function imperially as representatives of the American way of life. While the English language and the American entertainment industry have seen enormous success across the globe, only certain aspects of American cultural diffusion overseas contain moralizing elements. The pop culture of music, movies, and television remain somewhat distinct from those civilizing aspects of the American culture that pertain to systems of government and economy. The neoconservative crusade under George W. Bush and its accompanying moral culture strive to reconstruct other nations in an imperial American fashion. Liberal internationalism is merged with the expansionist tendencies of the postmodern capitalist system to produce an insidiously aggressive desire to extend the reach of Empire.

America – a conservative country...appears now before the world a naked and arbitrary power, as, in the name of realism, its men of decision enforce their often crackpot definitions upon world reality. The second-rate mind is in command of the ponderously spoken platitude. In the liberal rhetoric, vagueness, and in the conservative mood, irrationality, are raised to principle. Public relations and the official secret, the trivializing campaign and the terrible fact clumsily accomplished, are replacing the reasoned debate of political ideas in the privately

---

<sup>101</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, p. 322



incorporated economy, the military ascendancy, and the political vacuum of modern America.<sup>102</sup>

This is not at all to suggest that the blue American constituencies are actually opposed to international progress, imperialism, and the expansion of American markets. They are engaged equally in the process of accumulation of capital, in the economic, cultural, and physical senses. As a civilization, the American empire ranks rather high on the all time list of civilizations that have achieved international permeation of cultural capital. The bluer states no doubt partake in this venture and are often fully aware of their inclusion in the contest of civilizations. Indeed, the cultural and financial capitals of the United States are the bluest of blue areas. However, their exposure to more international influences inspires them to take on more altruistic positions vis-à-vis the poor and oppressed both within the American civilization and without. The blue state inhabitants thus have come to favor different means of accomplishing the *mission civilisatrice*.

While the frontier mentality condones an aggressive, primordial, and simplistic view of force, the leftist contingent in American politics bears different expectations about the form of American empire. In keeping with the character of Hardt and Negri's thesis on the spread of empire, the blue state types fulfill a distinctive role in the struggle to realize Manifest Destiny. If viewed as a referendum on the War in Iraq, the 2004 Presidential election demonstrates the extent to which Kerry voters disdained the means that President Bush had selected for carrying out the imperial task. However, this does not suggest that the blue states are in fact opposed to the expansionist adventures. Yet, it seems clear that the blue states have a preference for exerting American influence in a manner that perhaps Europe would approve – namely a diplomatic, peaceful, and multilateral approach. The red state contingent provides the brawn for the colonial

---

<sup>102</sup> Mills, C. Wright. The Power Elite. Oxford University Press, New York. 1956, p. 361

expedition because, ideologically speaking, the inhabitants of these states generally operate with premodern assumptions about the use of force in an anarchic international system and the inefficacy of the rule of international law. The blatant disdain for international bodies and the crude embrace of a Darwinian survivalist doctrine prop up a crusading militancy that functions as a significant component of the imperial totality.

It is next helpful to analyze the way Walter McDougall explains the complex origins of the eight strains within American foreign policy.<sup>103</sup> The *mélange* of ideological influences renders the American ideal a multifaceted, often contradictory proposition. McDougall breaks down the history of American foreign policy into two periods, which he calls the Old Testament and the New Testament. The former is comprised of exceptionalism, unilateralism, the Monroe Doctrine, and Manifest Destiny. The latter includes progressive imperialism, liberal internationalism (Wilsonianism), containment, and global meliorism. McDougall scorns both ambitiously melioristic foreign policy à la Clinton and Wilsonian rhetoric emerging from the neoconservative camp such as “William Kristol’s candid call for an American ‘benevolent hegemony’ over the whole world.”<sup>104</sup> While blue states certainly identify with a melioristic brand of Wilsonianism, the red states sounded their enthusiastic espousal for a more imperialist vision of Manifest Destiny in the 2004 election.

### **Empire and Democratic Peace**

In Frances Fox Piven’s conception, the heartland has been duped into supporting an imperial war, and American corporate interests have solidified their prospects for the future. Relying on the hordes of red state Americans to sponsor their international ventures even if it betrays their material interests, multinational corporations export American culture in a process

---

<sup>103</sup> McDougall, *Promised Land*, p. 10

<sup>104</sup> McDougall, *Promised Land*, p. 200

that does not directly benefit most heartland residents. Focusing on immaterial labor and affective interactions, the economic order cannot make use of anachronistic heartland attitudes.<sup>105</sup> Therefore, the red state participation in the expansionist process takes on a different form. Regardless, the construction of the Americo-centric Empire is for Hardt and Negri the constitutionalization of a supranational world power.<sup>106</sup> The legal and moral hegemony achieved by this nation-state is limited, however, by the emergent rhizomatic distribution of power within the international system. Though the theory behind *Empire* dictates that communications and economic networks are decentralized due to the ascendance of complex technologies and the dominance of immaterial labor, the United States saunters on as a “supranational sovereign entity” that imposes its “contractual agreement grounded on the convergence of pre-existing state subjects.”<sup>107</sup>

Global civil society and the burgeoning transnational democracy, which operates with Hobbesian contractual obligations, enforces via unitary power the necessary Lockean counterpowers throughout the dominion of this American system of world organization.<sup>108</sup> The Leviathan embraces its subject peoples and achieves an overwhelming sense of imperial control yet is restrained from functioning merely as a policeman. The desire to spread the good news of progress, reason, and capitalist free markets renders the hegemon sometimes benevolent, even if this compulsion to instill freedom into the heathen lands is merely to attain material supremacy in the economic superstructure.<sup>109</sup>

The capitalist project to bring together economic and political powers allows states to initiate wars when economic resources are threatened and still use the guise of political

---

<sup>105</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, p. 292

<sup>106</sup> “Empire” is capitalized in Hardt and Negri’s work because it characterizes the unity of the world order in which American imperial might is crucial but does not connote the centrality of production due to rhizomatic conditions.

<sup>107</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, p. 7

<sup>108</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, p. 8

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

justifications. Despite the obvious economic incentives to unleash the war machine, political explanations veil energy concerns, maintenance of free markets, and the explosive augmentation of corporate multinational muscle. Neoconservative principles indicate that the Empire ought to be expanded by citing the dual imperatives of freedom and democracy, two political ideals that neoconservatives naively pretend are independently viable. The symbolic vitality of this ideal shrouds the true engine behind the expansion of the frontier into the savage wilderness.

Economic growth and the stability of favorable resource flows ushers in an Empire in which the unity of earth under the god of money and markets is proclaimed by a manifest hierarchy and destiny. The ideologies of economy and polity merge such that the biopowers of the ruling class become concentrated in certain regions of the globe, suggest Hardt and Negri.<sup>110</sup>

In order to preserve the Empire's reach, it is necessary to engage in *justum bellum* against barbarians at the borders and internally against those rebellions that threaten rhizomatic production. The wars of Empire bring together the possibility of a legitimate military apparatus and the efficacy of force in securing peace. With such an ethico-political dynamic, the Hegelian genealogy of right creates an "order that envelops the entire space of what it considers civilization, a boundless universal space; and second, a notion of right that encompasses all time within its historical foundation."<sup>111</sup> A negative definition of power appears most robust in advancing a conception of Empire that truly takes on an entirely new set of ethico-political characteristics. The three primary factors that usher in this new era are the decline of nation-states; the gradual deregulation of international markets; and the impending end of interstate warfare.<sup>112</sup> This emergent expression of international power creates an entirely new paradigm, which results in systematic decline of those anachronistic pockets of resistance and a new form

---

<sup>110</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, p. 364

<sup>111</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, p. 11

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

of hierarchy. The centralized construction of norms along with rhizomatic creation resulting from communications advances allows for a sort of governance without government.

Though Empire dictates that the “ontological basis of antagonism” is the overarching importance of economic might over all else in securing energy sources, capital markets, and labor, this juridical order must acknowledge the immaterial desires of the backlash.

The most prominent social agenda of the current Christian fundamentalist groups is centered on the re-creation of the stable and hierarchical nuclear family, which is imagined to have existed in a previous era, and thus they are driven specifically in their crusades against abortion and homosexuality. Christian fundamentalisms in the United States have also continuously been oriented (in different times and different regions more or less overtly) towards a project of white supremacy and racial purity...the ‘return’ to the traditional family’ of the Christian fundamentalists is not backward-looking at all, but rather a new invention that is part of a political project against the contemporary social order.<sup>113</sup>

Empire relies upon the efforts of media manipulation to mold public opinion and hasten political action. While *Empire* suggests that the notion of media control over the world order and other conspiracies are both true and false, the implication of the philosophical declarations is that the society of control is continuously being expanded to include new terrain. “Still fear is what binds and ensures social order...primary mechanism of control that fills the society of the spectacle,” Hardt and Negri claim.<sup>114</sup> In addition, there is the ever-growing presence of superstition that trumps the ability of consumption to satisfy people’s desire for pleasure. The juxtaposition of *imperium* and *libertas* in the supranational order demarcates ideological boundaries and the acceptance of the imperial mission not by those being colonized but by those who have the option to carry out the *mission civilisatrice*.

---

<sup>113</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, p. 148

<sup>114</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, p. 323

## Red, White, and Blue Imperial Ideology

Where ideology does show statistical importance, contrary to Fiorina's thesis, is in accepting or rejecting the American trajectory towards Empire. The opposition between integrationist and isolationist forces elucidates a division between those Americans who feel more of an affinity for not just European ideals (in bluer areas) but also for the opportunities afforded by interactions with the Third World subjects being colonized. The integration of non-Western peoples and the sped up development of this imperial challenge is not necessarily welcomed by the typical heartland resident, unless the binary political code evokes a simple message of fear, security, and morality. As Frank argues, the international capital flows and great transnational corporations create an irresistible climate of domination by the society of control. Straddling the borders of this empire are certain individuals who enlarge the simultaneously democratic and expansionist tendency of the empire to fulfill its role as a universal republic.

Hardt and Negri contend that the imperial capacity of the United States is cleverly built into the Constitution, which accounted for the open space for empire and the obvious contradictions inherent to the unique American construction. While professing to construct a society in which all members could enjoy the same inalienable rights, some inhabitants were merely considered three-fifths human and heathens on the outskirts of the republic were discounted entirely from the constitutive process. In exporting the relatively democratic legacies of this uniquely American system to other international populations, the Wilsonian creation of world stability via a *Pax Americana* initiated an empire in which hegemony depended upon not just realist foreign policy considerations but also upon the happy acceptance of American moral authority. Regardless of whether this imperial task is viewed as imbuing false consciousness in the colonized persons, the process entails a triple imperative.<sup>115</sup> First, the inclusive tendency

---

<sup>115</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, p. 198

must carefully provide definitions of rights for those who are in positions of imperial control. Second, there is a sustained effort to operate on a differential basis, with subject peoples being recognized as necessarily distinct. Third, the managerial capacity of Empire determines the long-term viability of how biopowers are distributed throughout the territory.<sup>116</sup>

To gauge the founding of an international system of united nation-states that promote a specific juridical order, one must picture America as the inheritor of a European colonial legacy whose history contains the burdens of managing and administering multiple hegemonic relationships. Though Cold War antagonisms and anti-Soviet imperialism often provoked a bipolar view of the global balance of power, rhizomatic production multiplies the complexity of imperial tasks. Consequently, “simple concepts superimposed on simple divisions and simple enemies no longer suffice as basic ideological props of American geopolitics.”<sup>117</sup>

Fukuyama and his alleged end of history provide a posthistorical confidence in a teleological philosophy, but this outlook should be questioned due to the divisions within the West and also the incomplete domino effect in the unconverted regions of the world. By emphasizing materialism and the supremacy of economic criteria in measuring the expanse of Empire, one can realistically appreciate a Marxist critique of the naïve attempts to impose a strict American ideology on countries whose social relations do not support the desired political enterprise. It is helpful to recognize that “ideology (in the general sense) denotes a framework that structures any social or historical content that may be presented. This is, of course, an unsatisfactory formulation, one reason being that it fails to take account of practices and rituals ‘inscribed within the *material existence of an ideological apparatus*.”<sup>118</sup> In deconstructing the “omnihistorical reality of ideology,” it is increasingly evident that ideologies are central to the

---

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Stephanson, Manifest Destiny, p. 128

<sup>118</sup> Lock, Grahame. in Callari, Antonio and Ruccio, David (ed.) Postmodern Materialism and the Future of Marxist Theory. Wesleyan University Press, London. 1996, p. 75

human endeavor to attain biopower and construct an ethico-political framework to sustain such biopower.<sup>119</sup>

In the process of examining the traditional domination of neoclassical economics and the neoliberal political model, one realizes that Post-Autistic Economics is necessary in order to discard the ideologically-driven premises of this neoclassical system.<sup>120</sup> The methods employed by alter-globalists in constructing a distinct view of international relations tend towards incorporating a fuller account of the social and ecological costs of progress on the economic front.<sup>121</sup> Entrenched market fundamentalism blurs the distinction between science and ideology. While Althusser's formulation of the practical uses of ideology by particular social forces compels one to reject the backlash theorists and their crude focus on attaining enlightenment through denial of worldly values, America's actions are judged to be disingenuous.

Ideology is a system of representation guaranteeing, in all societies, the relation of individuals to tasks fixed by the structure of the social totality. This system of representations is therefore not a system of knowledge but, on the contrary, the system of illusions necessary to subjects in history. In a class society, ideology acquires a supplementary function: keeping individuals in the place required by class domination. The principle of subversion of this domination *therefore belongs to the contrary of ideology, namely science.*<sup>122</sup>

Next, it would be useful to analyze the penetration of American ideology and foreign policy considerations that rely on ideological illusions and an idealized depiction of American history. The institution of foreign policy in the United States contains various strains, certain of which are given preferential treatment in particular historical accounts of the evolution of this foreign policy debate. Michael Hunt establishes that the dominant ideology of foreign policy

---

<sup>119</sup> Ibid

<sup>120</sup> Post-Autistic Economics aims to move beyond the abstract, hypothetical models that have traditionally limited neoclassical economics to ideological posturing. The homepage is [www.paecon.net](http://www.paecon.net).

<sup>121</sup> As opposed to anti-globalists, alter-globalists are said to advocate a different sort of globalization. Hardt and Negri cite their importance to the formation of Empire, as they seek, among other things, increased power for NGOs.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, p. 77



constitutes a tripartite ideal: national greatness, racial hierarchy, and aversion to revolution.<sup>123</sup> He also declares that the goal is not to insulate foreign policy from the democratic process. The moralism and legalism that accompany public opinion can complement the complex reality of international affairs. While there most certainly will always be a diplomatic elite of professionals whose job it is to manage foreign relations, Kennan's tremendously naïve theories need not be given too much credence. For Hunt, the "ethnocentric assumptions, national biases, or cultural presuppositions" that Kennan claims to forsake are as much a part of Kennan's self-proclaimed non-ideology as they are a part of ideologies that are more honest about their roots.<sup>124</sup> The hypocrisy contained in Kennan's supposed aversion to ideology and his thorough efforts to spread his realist foreign policy gospel becomes quite baffling.

Like Hunt, Lieven views the deep-rooted, red state chauvinism of Bush's foreign policy as a thorough rebuttal of Clinton's liberal democratic ideology. Though many intellectuals depict Clintonian international interventionism in Kosovo and Haiti as a continuation of Cold War imperial tactics, Lieven rightly sees the Bush doctrine as more nationalistic and less intelligent. So, Hunt's concept of ideology as a functional tool of the American political elites to enrich their sociopolitical control contains echoes of Geertz's model of ideology as a cultural system of symbols, values, and beliefs. Hunt proposes an "open-minded inquiry into the roots of ideology...non-economic impulses, in particular those stemming from racial or ethnic identity, strong nationalist preoccupations, an evangelical faith, and pronouncedly regional concerns."<sup>125</sup> The idea of natural greatness, expressed as promotion of liberty, racial hierarchy, and anti-revolutionary character are thus the three symbolic strains that Hunt emphasizes, in contrast to

---

<sup>123</sup> Hunt, Michael. Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy. Yale University Press, New Haven. 1987, p. 18

<sup>124</sup> Hunt, Ideology, p. 8

<sup>125</sup> Hunt, Ideology, p. 12

McDougall's depiction of an eight-sided foreign policy tradition that is equally balanced by exceptionalist, isolationist tendencies and imperial, crusading desires.

The *mission civilisatrice* and exceptional nationalism that link America more to developing world's sense of nationhood and religion than to the West are potentially pernicious with regards to American nation-building in the Middle East and beyond. "A foreign policy no longer chained to our current tribal misconceptions and vaulting ambition might well be a better policy," argues Hunt.<sup>126</sup>

### **Critical Theory and the Heartland**

Homi Bhabha and his focus on post-structural hybridity and its anti-essential characteristics might assist in defining the in-between status of the American heartland as a bastion of premodern social positions and swindled voters.<sup>127</sup> The subaltern status of the oppressed class of American citizens whose economic interests run contrary to the program that they have supported at the polls is undeniable. However, for this alienated underclass, cultural domination of the national discussion seems more important to attain than access to the deep superstructure of the political system. In line with Gramsci's observations about cultural hegemony, Frank's backlash theorists seek to attain their own culturally hegemonic relationship in the face of immensely powerful popular culture interests. With regards to foreign policy decisions, the typical red state supporter of the Bush Doctrine welcomes American civilizing adventures, even if the international community is "uncomfortable with Bush's evangelically-inspired intonations, disturbed by the brutal simplification of world affairs as represented by his Axis of Evil concept, and appalled by his use of the word 'crusade' to describe the U.S.'s fight against terrorism."<sup>128</sup>

---

<sup>126</sup> Hunt, *Ideology*, p. 192

<sup>127</sup> <http://www.scholars.nus.edu.sg/landow/post/poldiscourse/bhabha/bhabha1.html>

<sup>128</sup> Gilman, Nils. *From Bosnia to Baghdad: The Tension between Unilateralism and Transformation*. Berkeley Electronic Press, 2005. Berkeley, p. 4

So, the initially broad-based support for the invasion of Iraq is buttressed by a nationalist heartland contingent that identifies strongly with the idealist rhetoric of the Bush Doctrine and its excessive reference to spreading liberty and freedom throughout the world. “But American imperial power in the service of narrow American (and Israeli) nationalism is a very different matter and is an extremely unstable base for hegemony.”<sup>129</sup> Lieven is under the impression that the certain constituencies have hijacked the foreign policy agenda to the extent that the typical American does not realize how his interests are not served by his government’s crusading. Gramsci highlights that one cannot be under the illusion that a society is “free from domination if the government or state is not using overt coercion and physical force to dominate its subjects.”<sup>130</sup> Like Althusser, Gramsci observes the ideological state apparatuses that transmit the dominant legal, educational, and media-related ideas via their cultural hegemony. Diametrically opposite the position of Fukuyama, these Marxist theorists understand that the historical dialectic continues, with the cultural hegemony of the bourgeoisie forestalling the emergence of a revolutionary new paradigm that emphasizes the interests of subaltern classes.

Contrary to other political theorists who emphasize the hegemonic power of elites, Zizek believes that all people are complicit in the construction of ideology and are aware of the gaps and contradictions contained within their beloved ideological systems. Through the interpellations of ideology, Zizek believes that people actually desire to live under such systems. This pluralist approach defies the notion propagated by Gramsci that ideology is typically hegemonic. Zizek would acknowledge that a sort of democratic conspiracy, rather than a conspiracy of the ruling political elites, rules modern liberal nations. By allowing ordinary

---

<sup>129</sup> Lieven, *America*, p. 14

<sup>130</sup> Ives, Peter. *Language and Hegemony in Gramsci*. Pluto Press, Ann Arbor. 2004, p. 6

people to fill in the gaps of the ideological network, laypersons are empowered to construct the framework of their political positions.<sup>131</sup>

The task of delineating the current American imperial adventures might be aided by an understanding of orientalism as it is defined by Edward Said, who explains the exoticism of the “other” as a function of imperial reach.<sup>132</sup> In defining the boundaries of the republican, imperial entity, it is necessary to legitimize the possibilities of expansion with lofty imperatives. For America, this involves a “translation of divine predestination, a notion appropriate to the sectarianism of one generation, into the secular terms of national predestination by subsequent generations with different problems of identity and purpose to work out.”<sup>133</sup> The traditionally implicit and informal American ideology was never dramatically altered by foreign invasion or occupation, as were other national ideologies. The public rhetoric spouted by political figures is always filled with codewords that appeal alternatively to the faith and logic of the populace. Walter Lippmann would justify this symbolic rhetoric, which is conveyed in manageable terms, because he believes that the public cannot necessarily grasp the complex reality of foreign policy debates.

Within these deliberations, it is difficult to pinpoint a dominant ideology that wins over either the majority of the political elite or the majority of the populace. The idea of two disparate Americas divided into red and blue perhaps does not offer a nuanced enough view of foreign policy considerations. Though there are competing visions that vie for dominance of the cultural landscape, is there a specific essence of the dominant ideology? It seems that the unitary factors in linking red states to other red states is not necessarily a general consensus about how to solve political and economic problems but is simply a socio-economic lag, that often compels people

---

<sup>131</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zizek>

<sup>132</sup> Said, Edward. Orientalism. Vintage Books, New York. 1979.

<sup>133</sup> Hunt, Ideology, p. 16

to take a more premodern stance on issues of international significance. A more ignorant, belligerent, or jingoistic stance is not necessarily out of touch with the trends towards consensual minimalism in international relations. The international division of war labor in the application of Western power overseas dictates that America's potent combat potential is well suited for military campaigns, while European nations focus on post-combat operations. "Whereas the U.S. public warmed to a muscular, martial self-image but disliked long foreign entanglements, European publics preferred to imagine their military engagements as benevolent efforts to improve the quotidian experience of civilians."<sup>134</sup>

### **Rationality and the Limits of Liberty**

Indubitably, red America is confident in assuming this brawny role within the international division of war labor, while blue America would like to see a softer, more diplomatic American role in foreign affairs. The militant, heartland view is fitting for a segment of the American population that is less likely to consider the interests of other countries. Also, since predominantly rural areas have fewer links to the international system of states by nature of their geographic isolation, they can afford to disdain any meddling in international affairs. The red states are clearly experiencing slower development on the linear path to progress of the median inhabitant. In general, a skeptical view towards immigrants, anti-European attitudes, and pronouncedly pro-white, pro-Western sentiments also are more characteristic of the red state mentality. Yet, ethnically based concepts of bigotry are certainly not limited to what have been labeled red states. Resistance to integration of non-Western peoples and ideals into the melting pot undoubtedly springs up from time to time throughout all parts of Purple America. "I'd rather see Hitler and Hirohito win than work next to a nigger," exclaimed one white factory worker

---

<sup>134</sup> Gilman, Bosnia, p. 2

during the racial strife of 1943 in highly industrial Detroit.<sup>135</sup> The integrationist trend of the era certainly provoked a tremendous backlash among resentful white factory workers. The unsteady march towards maximum GDP has not always motivated American behavior on the racial front.

However, the U.S. has tended to incorporate African-Americans into places of employment and neighborhoods in times of war - when it was a national necessity to absorb African-Americans into white life. The imperatives of the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, and World War Two rendered the white American population in need of amplified national manpower. In order to broaden the labor force and increase the ranks of those willing to serve in the military, the federal government often undertook integrationist policies specifically during those periods when the national fate was called into question. War plays into the imperialist discourse by defining the boundaries of Empire and most recently by demarcating the internal boundaries between ideologically disparate regions of the vast American land mass. An acute conservative American arrogance and belief that the U.S. has unique knowledge about how to make the world a better place seem to translate into imperialist attempts.

Though perhaps the right wing of the American ideological spectrum would typically be considered more self-centered and the left wing more altruistic, much of today's rightist politics take into account a nontraditional conception of self-interest. While every self-regulating ideological system must be balanced between altruistic and selfish components, the rationality of voting according to material self-interest is oftentimes trumped by a focus on otherworldly goods.

Three quarters of the American population literally believe in religious miracles. The numbers who believe in the devil, in resurrection, in God doing this and that - it's astonishing. These numbers aren't duplicated anywhere else in the industrial

---

<sup>135</sup> Smith, Rogers M. and Klinkner, Philip A. The Unsteady March: The Rise and Decline of Racial Equality in America. University of Chicago Press, Chicago. 1999, p. 180

world. You'd have to maybe go to mosques in Iran or do a poll among old ladies in Sicily to get numbers like this. Yet this is the American population.<sup>136</sup>

Rational choice theory suggests that preference orders reflect personal hierarchies of the utility derived from commensurable goods. Spiritual preferences and national pride perhaps do not rest comfortably on the traditional preference orders. Plus and minus within the spiritual hierarchy result from attainment of a whole different set of goods valued by American political consumers. The utility derived from spiritual goods is definitely not amassed in the same way as Marxist capital or other more commensurable things. Confusingly, American society has decided that the term “values” applies only to a certain set of conservative opinions that entail placing moral and cultural concerns higher up on the preference ladder than material concerns. “Why does an ideological position become sacrosanct when it gets labeled as a ‘value?’” asks Michael Kinsley.<sup>137</sup> Values seem much more compelling in the propaganda war than mere opinions. Thus, contrary to the typical notion of economic value, the category of opinions considered values ranked atop the list of priorities for red state voters in the 2004 election.<sup>138</sup> This conception of value must surely be confounding for rational choice theorists who are faced with constructing preference orders that involve a number of different forms of capital. A robust theory of value must account for spiritual and cultural capital as well. Therefore, it seems that self-interest is a deeply complicated notion that incorporates rather complex issues of national, moral, and historical values, when it comes to the self-interest of Frank’s backlash constituency.

---

<sup>136</sup> Noam Chomsky interview, 1994

<sup>137</sup> Michael Kinsley, “When Ideology is a Value,” *Washington Post*, November 28, 2004

<sup>138</sup> *The Associated Press*, “Moral values, terrorism fears propelled Bush,” November 3, 2004

## Conclusion

Thus, it is apparent from exit polls that red state and blue state inhabitants demonstrate divergent preferences in the economic and social realms. While there is no perfectly precise science to the pattern of distribution of red and blue in the United States, the prevalent trend in the past two elections has been towards bluer urbanized areas that also exhibit a concentration of education, wealth, and international linkages. Therefore, though voting patterns in presidential elections cannot be completely broken down, there is a range of predictors that help understand how regions will vote. Moreover, support for a jingoistically-oriented foreign policy clearly emanates more from the heartland than from the coastal, metropolitan blue areas where Americans identify more with European tactics of diplomacy and multilateralism.

While the ideological divide exists, there are no clear ideological boundaries between either counties or states. Depictions of voter density give the best impression of where blue and red are most concentrated, with blue dominating in and around the urban centers of the Northeast and the West Coast. Blue states generally exhibit higher median socio-economic status, whereas red state inhabitants tend to self-identify as more religious and patriotic. Perhaps both the Democrats and the Republicans would benefit from focusing on geographical constituencies where their support is already more pronounced. New Democratic National Committee chair Howard Dean has expressed his intention to lure so-called faith voters back to his party, on the premise that liberals ought not discount fears of cultural decline and the rising importance of moral values.<sup>139</sup> The future will be generous to the ideological camp whose focus is on the new economics of cultural hegemony and the concurrent expression of American political will across the globe.

---

<sup>139</sup> Bob Burnett, "That Other America," Altnet.com, April 25, 2004



## Bibliography

- Balkin, J.M. Cultural Software: A Theory of Ideology. Yale University Press, New Haven. 2003.
- Bell, Daniel. The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism. Basic Books, Inc, New York. 1976.
- Callari, Antonio and Ruccio, David (edited). Postmodern Materialism and the Future of Marxist Theory. Wesleyan University Press, London. 1996.
- Cohen, Lizabeth. A Consumer's Republic. Alfred A. Knopf, New York. 2003.
- Debord, Guy. The Society of the Spectacle. Translation by Donald Nicholson-Smith. Zone Books, New York. 1995.
- Fiorina, Morris. Culture War? Pearson Longman, New York. 2005.
- Frank, Thomas. What's the Matter With Kansas?: How Conservatives Won the Heart of America. Metropolitan Books, New York. 2004.
- Gilman, Nils. What the Rise of the Republicans as America's First Ideological Party Means for the Democrats. Berkeley Electronic Press, 2004. Berkeley.
- Gilman, Nils. From Bosnia to Baghdad: The Tension between Unilateralism and Transformation. Berkeley Electronic Press, 2005. Berkeley.
- Hardt, Michael and Negri, Antonio. Empire. Harvard University Press, Cambridge. 2000.
- Hunt, Michael. Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy. Yale University Press, New Haven. 1987.
- Ives, Peter. Language and Hegemony in Gramsci. Pluto Press, Ann Arbor. 2004.
- Jacobs, Jane. The Death and Life of Great American Cities. Vintage Books, New York. 1961.
- Kaczynski, Ted. The Unabomber Manifesto: Industrial Society & Its Future. Jolly Roger Press, Charlotte. 1995.
- Klinkner, Philip A. Red and Blue Scare: The Continuing Diversity of the American Electoral Landscape. Berkeley Electronic Press, 2004. Berkeley.
- Lieven, Anatol. America Right or Wrong: An Anatomy of American Nationalism. Harper Collins, London. 2004.
- McDougall, Walter. Promised Land, Crusader State. Houghton Mifflin Company, New York. 1997.

- Mills, C. Wright. The Power Elite. Oxford University Press, New York. 1956.
- Piven, Frances Fox. The War at Home. The New Press, New York. 2004.
- Said, Edward. Orientalism. Vintage Books, New York. 1979.
- Smith, Rogers M. and Klinkner, Philip A. The Unsteady March: The Rise and Decline of Racial Equality in America. University of Chicago Press, Chicago. 1999
- Stein, Howard F. Developmental Time, Cultural Space; Studies in Psychogeography. University of Oklahoma Press, London. 1987
- Stephanson, Anders. Manifest Destiny. Hill and Wang, New York. 1995.
- Todd, Emmanuel. Après L'Empire: Essai sur la decomposition du système américain. Gallimard, Paris. 2002.

### **Websites**

[http://www.geocities.com/blue\\_vs\\_red\\_2004/](http://www.geocities.com/blue_vs_red_2004/)

<http://www.topalli.com/blue/>

<http://www.mobergpublications.se/arguments/ideology.htm#ideomodel>

<http://www.infoplease.com/spot/colors1.html>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main\\_Page](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page)

<http://www.scholars.nus.edu.sg/landow/post/poldiscourse/bhabha/bhabha1.html>

<http://www.davidbrin.com/realculturewar2.html>

## **Acknowledgments**

I would first like to thank my thesis advisor, Professor Rogers Smith, for his continued support of my intellectual inquiries and his countless scholarly suggestions of books, ideas, and theories. Next, thanks to my major advisor, Professor Waldemar Hanasz, for providing a forum for discussion of rational choice models, even if I sometimes disagreed with the premises behind these theories. Thanks to innumerable Penn friends and comrades for their insight and perspicacity. Many thanks to the Penn Disarm Bush crew of Matt Scullin, Yuri Perez, and Stefan DeClercq. I would also like to thank Josh Rowe for many invaluable discussions on critical theory and politics. Finally, I greatly appreciate my family's constant encouragement, including my brother Matt's political antics on his Air Williams radio show.