

The New Right Frankenstein? Culture War and the Abnegation of Class₁

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"Middle America" by Kristina Abraham

With the re-election of George W. Bush on November 3rd, 2004, the liberal U.K. *Daily Observer* ran a front page headline asking, "How can 59,054,087 people be so DUMB?" (Associated Press, 2004). Perhaps unbeknownst to the *Observer's* editors, they had inadvertently confirmed a central hypothesis of the ideology of "Culture War" in the eyes of a significant portion of white, working-class Americans who supported Bush. This hypothesis, which argues that a Europeanized, condescending, east-coast Liberal establishment is the cause of much of the plight of working-class Americans, is a central tenet of the New Right, which seeks to portray the Republicans as the party of the common man and the Democrats as a party beholden to a powerful liberal elite that wishes to impose its will upon "ordinary," "average" Americans through its control of the media, academia, and government bureaucracy (Frank, 2004a). This all-powerful liberal elite is portrayed in New Right literature as contemptuous of common, working Americans, disdainful of their values and morals as archaic and anachronistic.² The New Right has sought to propagate this view amongst the working class in order to stoke resentment against liberals while simultaneously representing conservatism as a sympathetic political ideology aligned with working-class interests.

This paper seeks to explore the success of this worldview in capturing the support of a significant portion of white, working-class Americans to a Republican Party whose

economic policies are at best inimical to the interests of this segment of American society. As Thomas Frank characterizes it,

Here is a rebellion against "the establishment" that has wound up abolishing the tax on inherited estates. Here is a movement whose response to the power structure is to make the rich even richer; whose answer to the inexorable degradation of working-class life is to lash out angrily at unions and workplace safety programs; whose solution to the rise of ignorance in America is to pull the rug out from under public education (Frank 2004b).

In attempting to understand the processes that have led a sizable portion of the population to vote against its own economic interests, this paper will examine three key facets of culture-war ideology that best explain the ability of the Republican Party to frame itself as aligned with the interests of white, working-class Americans. These include the substitution of cultural grievances for class grievances; the cult of religious and racial victimization; and physical security from terrorist threats.³ However, in outlining these facets I will note that many of these themes overlap and interpenetrate each other to form the culture war worldview. In addition, while the New Right has proffered this ideology to win over a sizable section of the American working class, the culpability of the Democratic Party and the American Left in *losing* the support of this constituency will also be examined.

Before proceeding a few methodological qualifications are in order. Firstly, this paper seeks to explain the actions of a *segment* of the white, American working class; namely those primarily located in "Middle-America" that supported the Republican Party in the 2004 Presidential election.⁴ Indeed, while the Republicans captured a substantial degree of support from this segment of American society, a majority of working-class Americans in 2004 still supported the Democrats (*New York Times*, 2004).⁵ Secondly, the adoption of the ideology of culture war should not be viewed as the sole determinant for why a white, working-class American might choose to vote Republican. For example a recent Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) poll on political knowledge illustrated that a majority of Bush supporters incorrectly believed the President to be *in favour* of policies that would be consistent with working-class interests. Thus the possibility exists that some working-class Americans actually believed they were voting their economic interest based on an inaccurate perception of Bush administration economic policy (Kull, 2004).⁶ Lastly, one should always be cautious not to privilege ideology as the sole explanatory principle in understanding political behaviour. The existence of structural constraints, such as a two-party, winner-take-all system in the United States, can also factor into political choice or lack thereof.⁷ With these qualifications in mind, it is now possible to outline the origins of culture war ideology and how it has been able to provide a coherent worldview for a sizable portion of the American working class.

The ideological strategy of the culture war first took shape in the wake of the disastrous Barry Goldwater presidential campaign of 1964. As Mike Davis observes, the

lessons learned from the Goldwater defeat were to become the central tenets of culture war ideology as practiced by the New Right (Davis, 1986).⁸ With the wholesale popular rejection of the economic conservatism espoused by the Goldwater campaign, New Right theorists began to argue for a strategy that emphasized cultural issues over the economic.⁹ Ex-Goldwaterites like Kevin Phillips and Patrick Buchanan introduced the idea that a new right-wing majority might be built by "using anti-elitism to channel class hostility against a parasitic "New Class" lodged in the universities and government bureaucracy" (Ibid., 169).¹⁰ The notion of American society controlled by a "New Class" of intellectuals and technocrats, the forerunner of today's ubiquitous "liberal elite," was popularized by conservative theorists like James Burham and Irving Kristol. As Gary Dorrien observes, these theorists equated "liberalism" with the rationalization of the interests of this New Class of managers, lawyers, bureaucrats, social workers, consultants and academics (Dorrien, 1993). According to New Right theorists, the ideology of liberalism rationalized the creation of an all-encompassing welfare state, providing power and prestige to this New Class of managers and technocrats. As Dorrien argues, despite the concept's vague definition, the "electoral strength of the American Right partly depended on its capacity to make working-class voters resent the media, academics, and the government rather than America's business and financial elites" (Ibid., 382).¹¹

Indeed, it is this strategic exchange -- substituting a fictitious New Class of liberal elites as the target of working-class hostility rather than those whom wield real economic power in society -- that constitutes one of the central facets of culture-war ideology.¹² The ideology of culture war rests on its ability to erase the economic basis of social class by replacing the measurement of class based on cultural values and preferences. As Frank explains,

Class, conservatives insist, is not really about money or birth or even occupation. It is primarily a matter of *authenticity*, that most valuable cultural commodity. Class is about what one drives and where one shops and how one prays, and only secondarily about the work one does or the income one makes. (Frank, 2004a:113)

By framing social class in this manner, one can measure one's distance from or affinity with the working class by what products one consumes or what cultural activity one participates in. Thus, the multi-millionaire who drinks beer, drives a pick-up, and watches football is effectively on the same social footing as the meat-packer. By moving the definition of class onto the terrain of culture, the New Right has been able to portray itself as allied with the working class while propagating a gross caricature of liberals as arrogant college graduates driving Volvos and reading poetry.¹³

While this inversion of class is effective enough, it would fail to mobilize working-class voters to the degree it has if these "effete, arrogant" liberals were not attributed with an all-powerful, yet deleterious, influence over American society. Thus, conservative commentators constantly lament liberal control over the universities, the media, public education, the arts, and the public sector to name a few. Through this control over elite institutions, conservatives argue, the liberal elite is charged with responsibility for a

decadent liberal American culture that assaults family values, produces obscenity, disrespects authority, coddles criminals, stymies initiative, foments revolution and so on (Ibid., 123-25). As Frank argues, the erasure of the economic is a necessary precondition for such ideas to have any coherence:

It is only possible to think that the news is slanted to the left, for example, if you don't take into account who owns the news organizations and if you never turn your critical powers on that section of the media devoted to business news. The university campus can only be imagined as a place dominated by leftists if you never consider economics departments or business schools . . . it is possible to understand popular culture as the product of liberalism only if you have blinded yourself to the most fundamental of economic realities, namely, that the networks and movie studios and advertising agencies and publishing houses and record labels are, in fact, commercial enterprises (Ibid., 128).

However, part of the reason that such a discourse has gained currency with the working class is it does contain a germ of truth, albeit a very cleverly manipulated truth. As Justin Lewis notes in his study of U.S. public opinion, the emphasis within American political discourse is to discern one's political ideology or position based on one's stance in regards to social issues rather than economic issues (Lewis, 2001:179-80). As Lewis illustrates, elite opinion diverges from the American public in that while elite opinion tends to be economically conservative and socially progressive, the American public tends to be economically progressive yet socially conservative (Ibid., 94-95). Thus by carefully focusing political distinctions based on social issues alone, the ideology of culture war *can* portray elites as "liberal." As Lewis observes this also sustains a "number of mythic propositions about the liberal or leftist nature of certain institutions -- notably the notion of the "liberal media" (Ibid., 180). To quote Lewis:

If journalists are sometimes more liberal on [social] issues than the public as a whole -- which given their class profile, we might expect them to be -- these left-leaning attitudes *do not* extend to economic questions. Indeed on economic issues, people who work in the media are generally to the *right* of the general public (Ibid., 180).¹⁴

Thus based on social issues, the media *could* be characterized as "liberal," as long as economic issues are excluded entirely. It is through this exclusion of economics that the New Right can align itself with the working class by remaining conservative on social issues while carefully omitting or downplaying any consideration of economic differences. The success of this discourse is clearly illustrated by the opinion research data. John Harrigan points out that while poorer people are more likely to hold fairly left-wing views on economic policy issues, "they do not feel very positive about liberals generally" (Ibid., 180). The ability of the Right to define liberalism in regards to social issues rather than in regards to progressive economic policies has allowed it to effectively undercut any potential traction liberalism might have with working-class Americans.

By characterizing the elite as "liberal," conservatives can claim to stand for "the people" against the "power bloc," thereby portraying the Republican Party as "anti-establishment" and populist. This invocation of "underdog" status, constantly victimized by the machinations of the powerful liberal elite, constitutes the second key tenet of culture war ideology. Culture war ideology relies heavily on its ability to portray white, working-class Americans as victims of liberal inspired racial and religious policies (such as affirmative action, immigration, gay rights, etc.) that are said to be the cause of their diminishing opportunities. However, while the New Right has cleverly manipulated racist and religious sentiments to stoke working-class anger, the American Left is also culpable in that its retreat into identity politics has facilitated the New Right portrayal of whites as a victimized "race." Indeed, as Valerie Scatamburlo argues, the emphasis within sections of the left on an identity politics that impugns Whiteness lends itself to New Right characterizations of White victim-hood. While Whiteness certainly has its privileges in American society, not all Whites are materially advantaged. This is not to deny the existence of superior opportunity and life chances of Whites in comparison to other groups, but it is important to note that

60 percent of welfare recipients are White; 63 percent of those dependent on food stamps are White; and more than two-thirds of Americans without health insurance are White. Yet the prevailing discourses of multiculturalism have failed to address the concerns of over 70 percent of the population -- the White working and middle classes who also have to face diminishing educational, employment, and social resources (Scatamburlo, 1998: 190).

George Yudice argues that with the "institutionalization of identity politics on the Left," identity became the main anchor to one's politics. The problem with being White was that "it did not seem to bestow an identity which could be linked to any kind of oppositional politics" (Ibid., 190). Thus, the evacuation of class-based oppression from the theorization of identity politics effectively left White, working-class Americans in the lurch. Moreover, identity politics and multiculturalism, as exemplified by the media in campus speech codes and affirmative action, have not been particularly appealing to sections of White youth who have come to view themselves as members of a "beleaguered, "identitiless" constituency, as victims of a multi-cultural P.C. cabal" (Ibid., 191). Thus the Left's unwillingness to include White working-class Americans within its theorizations of oppression left this constituency vulnerable to the culture war rhetoric of White victimization. Indeed, Scatamburlo notes that the emergence of "White male identity politics" is a growing cultural phenomenon based on Whiteness as a *liability* rather than a privilege (Ibid., 192). Scatamburlo's observations are worth quoting at length:

Feeling threatened and besieged, there has been a tendency among White males to assume identificatory positions which are hyperbolic and in some cases extreme. The combined effects of identity politics which has served to challenge the traditional privileges and status of this group and economic decline engendered by the global restructuring of capital have

led many White males to assert their shared "oppression" as a group which is allegedly being victimized by women, minorities, and a "liberal" government which has kowtowed to "special interests" (Ibid., 192).[15](#)

Newitz and Wray characterize this rhetoric of "whiteness as liability" as going identity politics one better. By "painting themselves as the victims of multiculturalism," Whites can portray themselves as the "victims of victims," donning the most marginalized identity of all (Newitz & Wray, 1997: 174).

Thus, it has been the New Right, rather than the Left, that has capitalized on the deep sense of dislocation engendered by the demise of the social contract and the loss of relative job security within the American working class. However, rather than locating the cause of declining material conditions within the vagaries of the global economic system, the New Right has successfully indicted liberalism and its coterie of "special (read minority) interests" as the real culprits behind working-class insecurity.

Similarly, the New Right's indictment of multiculturalism also serves to underpin the assertion that liberals are behind the drive to eradicate Judeo-Christian moral values as the basis of American society. Multiculturalism is viewed as a "new form of secular humanism" designed to validate different lifestyles and moral systems that are antithetical to Christianity (Bertlet & Quigley, 1995: 35). According to the ideology of culture war, liberals seek to undermine Christianity by promulgating a relativistic secular humanism upon the nation. The purveyors of culture war frame every debate over religion through this prism, whether it be gay rights, sex education, evolution, school prayer, etc. These policies are viewed as attempts by a liberal, interventionist state to define the morals and beliefs of America.[16](#) Culture war scion Paul Weyrich sums up this worldview in a 1995 speech:

The real enemy is the secular humanist mind-set which seeks to destroy everything that is good in this society. The fight that we are fighting, the battle we have joined, is one that encompasses our entire life span. . . . The secular humanist state is very similar to the Soviet state, in the sense that it is based on lies, therefore it is internally weaker than it appears to be outwardly.[17](#)

This rhetoric of persecuted Christians at war with a liberal, secular society merely reinforces the cult of victim-hood at the heart of culture war ideology. Moreover, we can divine a deep sense of anti-government sentiment implicit in all the above culture war rhetoric: an all-powerful liberal elite, dominating the media, academia, and government imposing its beliefs and values upon the hard-working, common man through racial quotas, affirmative action, gay rights, abortion, etc.[18](#) As Noam Chomsky argues, locating the root of popular discontent with government effectively displaces "real power from view, suppressing the real sources of power in the society that control the economy and in fact set the conditions within which government operates" (Chomsky, 1997: 92). In effect, by viewing government as "the enemy," disaffected Americans are ostensibly turning away from the only structure of power within U.S. society that is even partially

accountable to the population (Ibid.). As Barbara Ehrenreich observes, those turning away from government are being welcomed into parallel social structures operated by right-wing evangelical Christian churches. Empowered by President Bush's "Faith Based Initiative" program, these churches offer a litany of traditionally public services from addiction counseling, to day-care, to welfare provision. However as Ehrenreich notes, these right-leaning churches use their provision of social services to proselytize their clients in order to demonize government run services and champion right-wing candidates and causes (Ehrenreich, 2004). Thus, this parallel network of social provision operates to attack the remnants of the American welfare state while capturing the ideological loyalty of the white, working classes.

Ostensibly what the ideology of culture war seeks to instill is a culture of fear within the working classes by offering up a litany of convenient scapegoats responsible for working-class insecurity. However, this sense of insecurity and uncertainty is not fabricated, the economic precariousness of the American working class is all too real. What the New Right has been able to accomplish is to portray itself as addressing this sense of insecurity by attacking fictitious bogeymen, while enacting economic policy that only furthers working-class anxiety and economic marginalization. The final tenet of culture war ideology -- that of security from the terrorist threat -- is further proof of this strategy.

From the outset, the War on Terror allowed the New Right to deploy many of the themes outlined above to mobilize voters to George W. Bush and the Republican Party. Whether it was ad campaigns featuring "wolves at the door," colour-coded security alerts, or Vice President Dick Cheney's warnings of terrorist annihilation, the Bush campaign sought to

create a deep well of fear in Americans, and to get them to vote on the basis of that fear. When the WTC was attacked and demolished, [Karl] Rove saw that it might be possible to convince Americans that no American, no community, would any longer be safe. Irrational and evil men from abroad could attack at any moment. No single school or shopping center was safe. People who had sworn to destroy Americans were liable to rise up anywhere, wreaking destruction and havoc on even the most serene or innocent American neighborhood (Gutman, 2004).

Attendant to this rhetoric of impending doom was a familiar castigation of liberals and Democrats as unable (or unwilling) to take the decisive actions necessary to secure the nation from the terrorist threat. Accompanied by the habitual feminized stereotype of the *effete* liberal as averse to military aggression or just down right unpatriotic, culture warriors assailed liberals for weakness and capitulation to terrorism (Horwitz, 2004; Sullivan, 2001; Frank, 2004a). John Leo, writing for *U.S. News and World Report*, succinctly sums up this characterization of liberals in his analysis of American voting behaviour:

Other voters are bothered by a constellation of ideas among some core Democrats: a vague but persistent hostility toward the military, a feeling that American influence abroad is almost always pernicious, and a cultural relativism that endorses almost any action by "oppressed" nations. These attitudes are traditionally excused or tolerated by the chattering classes. But we can't be surprised when nonchatterers react against them in the voting booth. (Leo, 2004)

While culture warriors stoked this resentment of cowardly liberals unwilling to defend the homeland, Republicans put forth some of the most damaging policies to working class economic interests. As Rahul Mahajan observes, during this climate of back-pedaling liberals attempting to assert their patriotism, Congress passed non-negotiable Fast Track authority for Free Trade Agreements, a \$15 billion airline industry bailout with no provisions for laid-off workers, and a massive \$100 billion "no-strings-attached" tax cut favouring mostly large American corporations (Mahajan, 2004). Indeed, the virulence of the Republican policy assault on working people is exemplified in Bush's proposed tax cuts. According to Paul Krugman, the administration's tax proposals "effectively achieve a longstanding goal of the radical right: an end to all taxes on income from capital, moving us to a system in which only wages are taxed -- a system, if you like, in which earned income is taxed but unearned income is not." (*New York Times*, Dec, 6, 2003).[19](#)

The degree too which this rhetoric of fear has paid off is evident when one examines the polling data in regards to concerns over terrorism. Jay Bookman of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* notes that

The voters least likely to be terror targets -- those in rural areas, small towns and the less populated states -- tended to be most frightened by the prospect of a terror attack. Conversely, voters in major metro areas that would be logical targets of terror, including New York and New Jersey, were least likely to be frightened by it (Bookman, 2004).

While part of this can be explained as the mere inability of culture war rhetoric to have much traction in the traditionally Democratic-leaning urban enclaves of the East coast, it also points to the degree of uncertainty and anxiety that exists in "Middle America" as opposed to the coasts. The economic restructuring in the wake of neo-liberal reforms has devastated vast swathes of Middle America thanks to the demise of the family farm, the concentration of agribusiness, the emergence of "corporate factory farms," and a growing methamphetamine epidemic fueling higher levels of crime than those in U.S. urban centres (Egan, 2002). Indeed according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, poverty rates for rural Americans are consistently higher than urban residents with an increased risk of child hunger. Moreover, 25% of America's rural poor reside in the American Midwest.[20](#) As Paul Street argues, the flight to conservatism's "national security" agenda among Middle America's working classes may reflect the "racially loaded psychological wage that imperial butt-kicking grants to much of the populace" and the role that

jingoistic imperialism plays in alleviating displaced feelings of economic insecurity (Street, 2004). Dale Maharidge concurs with this analysis. According to Maharidge,

The fear of terrorism is but one element that mixes quite well with a set of fears that are nothing new to millions of working class Americans. They have been hit with three decades of economic civil war. They have to contend with the fear of losing their job and the health insurance that goes along with it. Many people feel a rage about their circumstances, and Bush has channeled that into the war on terror. Prick the anger which on the surface may be pro-war and pro-Arab, after interviewing some white participants in a protest outside of a Chicago mosque on the first anniversary of 9/11, and one hears of ruined 401K's, health problems, lost work (Asen, 2004: 45).

Similarly, Jay Bookman argues that the rush to Bush by the American working class reflects the pervasive insecurity and anxiety of this sector of society as it watches its jobs, towns, culture and traditions sacrificed to the vagaries of multi-national capital (Bookman, 2004). Left with nowhere to turn for economic protection, the working classes turn to someone who at least offers promises of cultural protection. Indeed this underlying economic insecurity can be further illustrated by examining the real intent behind the supposed "moral values" that voters cited as the reasons for supporting Bush. As Chomsky notes, "in some polls when voters were asked to choose the most urgent moral crisis facing the country, 33 percent cited greed and materialism," while "31 percent selected poverty and economic justice" (Chomsky, 2004).²¹ What this seems to suggest is that economic interests and questions of class have not been driven out of the consciousness of the working class; rather, they have found no political outlet other than the cultural, racial, and security concerns encapsulated in the ideology of culture war.

While the culture warriors have cleverly displaced economic concerns with cultural and other social grievances, the failure to address the economic within the American political system falls equally (if not more so) on the Democratic Party and its steady drift towards neo-liberalism since the 1980's. As Davis notes, the defeat of Mondale in 1984 on a purported "progressive" economic platform led to the ascendance of "New Democrats," ideologically disposed to neo-liberal economic policy and intent on severing the Party's traditional labour and minority ties in favour of aligning with affluent, white-collar professionals (Davis, 1986). By moving to court this strata of society, the Democratic Party has abandoned any pretense of economic progressivism by championing Free Trade, deregulation, privatization, welfare "reform," and so on. Frank describes this as a "criminally stupid strategy," in that the result has been that *both* parties have become vehicles for upper-middle-class interests (Frank, 2004a: 243). Moreover, while the Right was "industriously fabricating their own class-based language" to appeal to working class voters, the Democrats were simultaneously jettisoning those same voters, "ousting their representatives from positions within the party and consigning their issues to the dustbin of history" (Ibid., 243-44). This strategy has played right into the hands of the New Right. As Christian conservative organizer Mark Gietzen observes, by removing basic economic issues from the table, "only the social issues remain to

distinguish the parties, [and] in such a climate, Democratic appeals to people of ordinary means can be easily neutralized" (Ibid., 176). Indeed by abandoning the progressive economic policies that Justin Lewis demonstrates a majority of working Americans support, the Democrats have effectively removed any affinities white, working Americans might have had with the Party. Shorn of its economic liberalism, the Democrats simply cannot compete with the New Right's social conservatism that is more in keeping with white, working class attitudes.

However as Frank observes, the Democratic leadership is not overly concerned with this loss of the white, American working class constituency. According to Frank, DLC strategy anticipates that as the New Right and Christian conservatives come to dominate the Republican Party, upper-class professionals will become increasingly alienated from the Party's strident social conservatism and flock *en masse* to the Democrats fiscal conservatism and social liberalism (Ibid., 244, Mertes, 2004). Such desires are not as delusional as they may seem, but they presage a various dangerous political environment. Chomsky notes that the ideology of the culture war and the social conservatism it has unleashed *has* unsettled certain sections of the economic elite. While economic elites recognize the need for the ideology of culture war in order to push through the economic agenda they desire, they are conflicted in regards to the stridency of social conservatism coming out of the Republican Party. Citing the elite's innate cultural liberalism, Chomsky argues that they do *not* want

to have their kids forced to pray in school. They don't want to have religious fundamentalists telling them what to do. They want their wives and daughters to have opportunities, abortion rights, and other forms of freedom. They don't want to restore the kind of values, for themselves in their personal lives, that [social conservatives] talk about. (Chomsky, 1997: 152)

So while Democratic desires to become the new "party of the rich" may not be too outlandish, the political environment this would augur has the potential to be extremely reactionary. By way of speculation, an American political system dominated by one party of the rich and affluent and another dominated by reactionary social conservatives that have obtained the loyalty of a significant portion of the working class could be potentially explosive. The ideology of culture war has instilled a deep resentment toward many mainstream institutions that legitimize both the U.S. political system and the American state, such as the media, academia and government. Furthermore it has also stoked palpable anger against visible minorities and women. The New Right is playing a very dangerous game if it believes it can continue to control these sentiments while pursuing policies that exacerbate the immiseration of working Americans.²² In such an environment the potential for a reactionary fascism would not be out of the realm of possibility, given the right leadership and alignment of class forces. Such an environment would be rife for what Antonio Gramsci deemed a "crisis of authority," where the dominant hegemony is disintegrating and the masses are detached from the legitimizing ideologies of the state (Femia, 1987). While Gramsci hoped that such an event would inaugurate a socialist revolution, he warned that the crisis of authority could be resolved

either to the advantage of reaction (what he deemed "Caesarism") or revolution, depending on *the levels of preparation within the left itself* (Boggs, 1984: 165). An American political system dominated by the kind of two-party system outlined above certainly would not appear to be able to reinvigorate the fortunes of the American left, especially considering its current marginalization and the capture of a significant section of the working class by the New Right. Thus the current trajectory of American politics may be flirting dangerously with creating the conditions necessary for a fascist reaction.

To conclude, this paper has attempted to outline the reasons behind the exodus of the white American working class to the politics of the New Right. While the themes outlined above do not apply to the entire American working class, I nevertheless hope to illuminate the motivations behind a significant portion of the American working class that view the politics of the New Right and the Republican Party as more in line with their interests than the politics of the Democratic Party, the traditional political vehicle for promoting working-class interests within the United States. In outlining this argument, I have attempted to show how the American New Right has capitalized on the Democrats' rejection of class-based politics by courting white, working-class Americans through an alternative political worldview that substitutes cultural grievances for economic grievances, inculcates a climate of persecution and victim-hood, and stokes a culture of fear, all the while indicting a ubiquitous "New Class" or "liberal elite" as responsible for working-class insecurity. Moreover, this inversion of class-based politics has taken place while New Right economic policies have only furthered the immiseration of the American working class. While much hand-wringing has gone on within parts of the Democratic party and the American Left as to how the fortunes of American liberalism can be reversed, they would be wise to heed Thomas Frank's ultimate conclusion as to why liberalism has become increasingly irrelevant to large sections of the American public:

This movement [the New Right] speaks to those at society's bottom, addresses them on a daily basis. From the conservatives, they get an explanation for everything that seems to have gone wrong. From the left, they hear nothing at all. (Frank, 2004b)²³

Indeed, the consequences for the American Left in continuing this silence and maintaining this irrelevance have perhaps never been greater.

Notes

¹ The author wishes to acknowledge John Shields and Colin Mooers for their insights and comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

² Frank notes that conservative commentators portray liberals as conceited intellectuals who "clearly regard [the common people] as their mental inferiors" (Ibid., 120).

[3](#) This aspect of culture war ideology obviously has increased salience since the September 11th attacks.

[4](#) By "Middle America," I mean primarily the geographic region defined as the "Midwest."

[5](#) According to the *New York Times* those earning under \$15,000 per year voted 63% in favour of the Democrats and 36% in favour of the Republicans. Those earning between \$15-29,999 per year voted 57% for the Democrats and 42% for the Republicans. See "How Americans Voted: A Political Portrait," *The New York Times* (November 7, 2004). However both white male and female working-class support for the Democrats has steadily eroded over the past decade. See Bob Wing, "The White Elephant in the Room: Race and Election 2004." *The Black Scholar* (Vol. 35, No. 1, Spring 2005). Anna Greenberg, "A Gender Divided: Women as Voters in the 2000 Presidential Elections," *Women's Policy Journal of Harvard* (Vol. 1, Summer 2001).

[6](#) The PIPA study notes that 74% of Bush supporters believed the President supported the inclusion of labour and environmental standards in trade agreements, a policy the Bush administration opposes. See Stephen Kull, *The Separate Realities of Bush and Kerry Supporters* (Program on International Policy Attitudes, October 21, 2004).

[7](#) Indeed the 59% who voted in the 2004 Presidential election are not representative of all eligible voters, with non-voters likely to be young, poor and minority -- groups more likely to vote for the Democrats. See Peter Dreier, "Why Bush Won; What to Do Next: Analysis of the 2004 Election," *Dissent* (Fall 2004).

[8](#) Davis defines the "New Right" as emerging from the Goldwaterite faction of the Republican Party, consisting of middle-class, college educated activists with a "transcendent commitment to a right-wing ideology and political agenda rather than to the Republican Party *per se*." Furthermore, Davis characterizes this faction, backed by emergent "Sunbelt" industry, as capitalizing on the growing backlash against the Civil Rights movement during this period. See Mike Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream: Politics and Economy in the History of the U.S. Working Class* (London: Verso, 1986), 166-167.

[9](#) See also Chip Berlet and Margaret Quigley, "Theocracy & White Supremacy: Behind the Culture War to Restore Traditional Values." In Chip Bertlet (ed), *Eyes Right: Challenging the Right Wing Backlash* (Boston: South End Press, 1995), 30.

[10](#) *Ibid.*, 169.

[11](#) Dorrien notes that what constitutes this "New Class" in New Right theory runs the gamut from solely liberal intellectuals to practically any profession associated with the public sector. *Ibid.*, 382.

12 It should be noted that working class hostility to the professional "managerial" class is not entirely misplaced, given the positions of command and authority this class can hold over the lives of the working class. See Barbara Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling: The Inner Life of the Middle Class*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989), 132-133.

13 While it is beyond the purview of this paper to explore this line of inquiry, it should be noted how feminized and physically emasculated liberals are in conservative portrayals.

14 Ibid., 180. The focus on journalists and other talking heads rather than ownership is integral to claims of "liberal bias." As Chris Lehmann notes, those "endlessly debatable matters of attitude, language pitch and representation, they have found, always trump mundane questions such as ownership and allocation of corporate resources." See Chris Lehmann, "The Eyes of Spiro Are Upon You: The Myth of the Liberal Media." In Thomas Frank & Dave Mulcahey (eds). *Boob Jubilee: The Cultural Politics of the New Economy*. (New York: Norton, 2003), 141.

15 Ibid., 192. While Scatamburlo does not explicitly define the category "White male," we should be careful not to associate these attitudes with *all* White men. I believe she is generally referring to those White males most affected by economic restructuring and who view the emergent power of minorities and women as usurping the last vestiges of patriarchal and white privilege left to them.

16 One of the more audacious examples of this supposed liberal contempt for Christianity was a Republican Party mailing to voters in Arkansas and West Virginia that claimed "liberals" were seeking to ban the Bible. See "Liberals Seek to Ban the Bible, Says Republican Election Mailing." *Church & State*. (November 2004), 18.

17 "The Rights and Wrongs of the Religious Right." *The Freedom Writer*. (October 1995). <<http://www.theocracywatch.org>>.

18 The contradictions in this line of reasoning are obvious, why is the government not associated with the Republican Party that has been at its helm for the last five years?

19 For a more detailed examination of Bush Administration policies and their deleterious effect on working people, see Frances Fox Piven. *The War at Home: The Domestic Costs of Bush's Militarism*. (New York: The New Press, 2004).

20 Cited in "A Different Landscape: Rural Poverty in America." *State Legislatures*. (Vol. 29 Issue 4, April 2003), 7.

21 The primacy of economic concerns couched within "moral values" is also confirmed by a "Votes for Women 2004" study that found jobs and the economy as the top issue in voters' determination for President. See *Votes for Women Survey*. November 9, 2004. <<http://www.votesforwomen2004.org>>.

[22](#) Of ominous note, current wealth inequality in the U.S. currently stands at its highest level since 1929. See Don Lattin, "Pushing Poverty into the "Moral-Values" Debate." *The San Francisco Chronicle* (Sunday, December 12, 2004).

[23](#) For a sample of current debates on the direction of the Democratic Party and the left in general, see Harold Meyerson, "Liberals: Go Red, Not Right." *Boston Globe*. (November 8, 2004)., Christopher Cook, "The Next Campaign: Ideas." *The San Francisco Progressive*. (December 10, 2004)., Matt Tiabbi, "No More Moore: The DLC Joins the Witch-Hunt." *The New York Press* (December 3, 2004).

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