

WHEN GOD COLLIDES WITH RACE AND CLASS:  
WORKING-CLASS AMERICA'S SHIFT TO CONSERVATISM

*Mark R. Thompson\**

The Knights of Columbus are . . . defending the values of faith and family that bind us as a nation. I appreciate your working to protect the Pledge of Allegiance, to keep us "one nation under God." I want to thank you—I want to thank you for the defense of the traditional family. [The Family] is a most fundamental institution for our society. I appreciate the fact you're promoting the culture of life.

We're making progress here in America. Last November, I signed a law to end the brutal practice of partial-birth abortion. This law is constitutional; this law is compassionate; this law is urgently needed; and my administration will vigorously defend it in the courts. We'll work together to strengthen incentives for adoption and parental notification laws. My 2005 budget [sic], I proposed to more than triple federal funds for abstinence programs in schools and community-based programs above 2001 levels. I'll continue to work with Congress to pass a comprehensive and effective ban on human cloning. Human life is a creation of God, not a commodity to be exploited by man.

I look forward to . . . defend[ing] the sacred bond of marriage. A few activist judges have taken it upon themselves to redefine the institution of marriage by court order. I support a constitutional amendment to protect the sanctity of marriage by ensuring it is always recognized as the union of a man and woman as husband and wife.

George W. Bush  
August 3, 2004

122nd Knights of Columbus Convention  
Dallas, Texas

With that speech President George W. Bush and the Republicans laid bare their strategy to divide and divert America's working class. With the economy struggling nationwide, and unemployment rising to more than 6 percent in states such as Ohio, Republicans shifted the focus of the upcoming election from the economy to issues of faith, gay marriage, abortion, and guns. Evoking an "us vs. them" mentality, they branded Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry as a "Massachusetts liberal who voted against the Defense of Marriage Act, backs civil unions for homosexuals, voted to defend the infanticide known as partial-birth abortion and wants to raise the federal income taxes that George Bush lowered."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Patrick J. Buchanan, *A Northern Strategy for Kerry-Gephardt*, Feb. 2, 2004, [http://www.wnd.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE\\_ID=36888](http://www.wnd.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=36888).

In the end, the strategy proved effective. Exit polls showed that 22 percent of voters named “moral values” as the most important issue to them—ranking it higher than the economy and the Iraq war.<sup>2</sup> Of that group, 80 percent voted for President Bush.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout history, elites have used religion and moral values to oppress and subordinate. Today, the efforts are less obvious, but the effects are no different. This paper will explore the willingness of people to sacrifice their own economic self-interests for the vague promise of “traditional” or “cultural” values. Specifically, it will investigate the theory of “false consciousness” as it applies to working class individuals’ identification with elites through the vehicle of traditional and moral values.

My thesis is that through the institution of religion and the promotion of “traditional” values, elites have divided the working class and distracted minorities and poor whites from the evils of poverty and injustice. If this thesis is correct, only through the common struggle of a unified multiracial working class will the masses be able to achieve true social justice.

Part I of this paper will examine the role that religion and traditional values played in the 2004 Presidential election. Part II will review the history and evolution of the Republican “Southern Strategy.” In Part III, I will discuss the interaction between values, ideology, and economic self-interest. Part IV will conclude with a detailed analysis of the interplay between religion, race, and class struggle.

## I. THE ROLE OF RELIGION AND MORAL VALUES IN THE 2004 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

In recent years, the institution of religion has become a stronghold and a solid base for the Republican Party. This was no more apparent than in the 2004 election. Bush’s victories in the battleground states of Florida, Iowa, Ohio, and elsewhere were directly dependent on the influence of the church. As one commentator put it: “None of this occurred suddenly or by happenstance . . . . For years, [Bush] has schooled himself in the machinations of the religious right, and Karl Rove has used the command center of the White House as more than its Office of Propaganda.”<sup>4</sup>

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2. John Murph, *Moral Values Push Bush to Victory*, Nov. 19, 2004, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/6531772/>. Cable News Network, *Presidential Exit Polls, 2004*, <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2004/pages/results/states/US/P/00/epolls.0.html> (last visited May 22, 2006) [hereinafter Cable News Network].

3. Cable News Network, *supra* note 2.

4. Sidney Blumenthal, *Crossing the Church-State Line*, Nov. 11, 2004, <http://www.salon.com/>

The mobilization of the church was fierce and remarkably organized. Karl Rove held a weekly conference call with selected religious leaders.<sup>5</sup> Evangelical church leaders turned their membership directories over to the Bush campaign for voter registration drives.<sup>6</sup> The Republican National Committee hired activist David Barton to speak to pastors throughout the country.<sup>7</sup> Barton encouraged pastors to endorse political candidates from the pulpit.<sup>8</sup> One preacher sent 136,000 pamphlets advising church leaders on issues such as gay marriage, stem cell research, and abortion, this in addition to a group associated with the Reverend Pat Robertson counseling 45,000 churches on how to campaign for Bush.<sup>9</sup> The Republicans recognized potential in these “values”-based issues and acted accordingly.

*(a) Maintaining the Stronghold: Bush and Evangelicals*

In the last two presidential elections an overwhelming majority of evangelical Christians voted Republican.<sup>10</sup> It is obvious how Bush continues to maintain a stranglehold on the evangelical Christian vote. When it comes to the social agenda of the religious right, Bush “puts his money where his mouth is.”

When it comes to policy . . . [George W. Bush] has done more than any president in recent history to advance the agenda of Christian social conservatives . . . . [H]e has opposed same-sex marriage, favored restrictions on abortion and imposed limits on embryonic stem cell research. He has promoted vouchers for religious schools and shifted money for sex education and reproductive health programs to those that instead promote abstinence.<sup>11</sup>

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opinion/blumenthal/2004/11/11/bush\_clergy/index\_np.html.

5. *Id.*

6. *Id.*

7. Deborah Caldwell, *David Barton & the “Myth” of Church-State Separation*, [http://www.beliefnet.com/story/154/story\\_15469\\_1.html](http://www.beliefnet.com/story/154/story_15469_1.html) (last visited May 21, 2006).

8. *Id.*

9. Blumenthal, *supra* note 4.

10. The PEW Research Center for the People and the Press, *Religion and the Presidential Vote: Bush’s Gains Broad-Based*, Dec. 6, 2004, <http://people-press.org/commentary/display.php3?AnalysisID=103> [hereinafter The PEW Research Center].

11. Laurie Goodstein, *Personal and Political, Bush’s Faith Blurs Lines*, N.Y. TIMES, Oct. 26, 2005, at A1.

Apparently evangelicals were pleased with Bush's first term and encouraged by the promise of a second: 78 percent of evangelicals voted for Bush in 2004, up from 68 percent in 2000.<sup>12</sup>

*(b) Politicization of the Pulpit and the Republicans' Appeal to Catholics*

While it was clear that heading into the 2004 presidential election, Bush had the evangelical vote in his back pocket, the political loyalties of Catholics were not so readily apparent. In 2000, 47 percent of Catholics voted for Bush and 50 percent for Al Gore.<sup>13</sup> In 2004, Catholics made up 26 percent of voters. As in 2000, Catholics were a swing group in 2004.<sup>14</sup> John Kerry, a Catholic himself, was expected to carry a large percentage of the Catholic vote considering that the two previous Catholic presidential candidates, Al Smith in 1928 and John Kennedy in 1960, each garnered 80 percent of that vote.<sup>15</sup> However, early in the campaign, Republicans recognized the potential in Catholic voters and pushed hard for this group of voters through an emphasis on "moral values."

The Republican National Committee made Catholic outreach a major priority, recruiting more than 50,000 Catholic team leaders to mobilize voters at the local level.<sup>16</sup> Bush made a point of visiting the Pope in June of 2004 and prominently displayed a picture of the two on his campaign website with the headline "Catholics for Bush."<sup>17</sup> Pro-life groups attacked Kerry in the media, running television ads which highlighted Kerry's support for abortion and countering efforts by liberal Catholic groups and the Kerry campaign were puny by comparison.<sup>18</sup>

Rejecting and ignoring their immigrant and labor roots, many Catholics succumbed to the ploys of the Right and chose to focus solely on the "moral" issues of abortion and gay marriage.<sup>19</sup> From the pulpit, Catholics heard church

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12. The PEW Research Center, *supra* note 10.

13. *Id.*

14. Jennifer Agiesta, *The Catholic Vote 2004: "Religious" Voters Aren't Always "Right"* (May 2, 2005), at [http://www.edisonresearch.com/home/archives/2005/05/religious\\_voter.html](http://www.edisonresearch.com/home/archives/2005/05/religious_voter.html).

15. Jean Torkelson, *Marriage Talk Mobilized Christian Voters*, ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS, Nov. 4, 2004, at 1F.

16. Steven Waldman & John Green, *Faith Works? Strong Performance among Evangelicals and Traditional Catholics in Key States Propels Bush's Victory*, [http://www.beliefnet.com/story/155/story\\_15567\\_1.html](http://www.beliefnet.com/story/155/story_15567_1.html) (last visited May 21, 2006).

17. *Id.*

18. *Id.*

19. *Id.*

officials proclaim that abortion should almost always take precedence over all other issues.<sup>20</sup> In May of 2004, the coadjutor bishop of Orlando, Florida, Thomas Wenski, published a statement in which he called pro-abortion Catholics who receive communion “boorish and sacrilegious” and suggested that they were in a worse moral position than Pontius Pilate after the condemnation of Christ.<sup>21</sup> According to a second Catholic bishop, merely voting for politicians who support abortion rights should jeopardize one’s eligibility to receive communion.<sup>22</sup> Still other Catholic bishops questioned Kerry’s claim to be Catholic considering his views on abortion and gay rights.<sup>23</sup> Other church officials spoke of denying Kerry communion and even excommunicating him.<sup>24</sup> In the words of one observer, “Sunday after Sunday, from thousands of pulpits, epistles were read and sermons delivered telling parishioners it was sinful to vote for candidates who supported gay marriage and abortion.”<sup>25</sup>

Exit polls revealed that the Republican strategy of emphasizing “moral values” proved effective given that 17 percent of Catholics reported that “moral values” was the most important issue for them.<sup>26</sup> In the end, Catholics voted decisively for Bush, 56 percent to Kerry’s 43 percent.<sup>27</sup> Catholics turned out to be a key voting demographic in all of the 2004 election’s battleground states. Thirty-two percent of the nation’s Catholic voters reside in the heavily contested states.<sup>28</sup> In Florida, Catholics made up 28 percent of the vote.<sup>29</sup> While 54 percent of Catholic Floridians voted for Bush in 2000, approximately 57 percent voted for him in 2004.<sup>30</sup> This 3 percent increase represents about 400,000 votes, roughly Bush’s margin of victory in the state.<sup>31</sup>

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20. Blumenthal, *supra* note 4.

21. Catholic World News, *Florida Bishop Rebukes Pro-Abortion Catholics*, May 19, 2004, <https://cwnews.com/news/viewstory.cfm?recnum=29666>.

22. Denver Archbishop Charles Chaput called the actions of Catholic politicians who publicly endorse policies that conflict with church teachings as “phony.” *Catholic Clergy Defended: Cardinal Bishops’ Unfairly Attacked for Political Views*, ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS, Nov. 18, 2004, at F2.

23. *Id.*

24. Blumenthal, *supra* note 4.

25. *Id.*

26. Agiesta, *supra* note 14.

27. *Id.* “According to Gallup Polls, only one Democrat since 1952 (Walter Mondale in 1984) lost the Catholic vote by this large a margin.” Waldman & Green, *supra* note 16.

28. Agiesta, *supra* note 14. According to the Agiesta article, of the eleven states decided by 5 percent or less, only Oregon has a Catholic population of less than 20 percent.

29. Waldman & Green, *supra* note 16.

30. *Id.*

31. *Id.*

Catholics perhaps registered their biggest impact in the state of Ohio, where Bush won the Catholic vote by eleven points, five points more than in 2000.<sup>32</sup> Without the Catholic vote increase, both Kerry and Bush would have received 48 percent of the vote.<sup>33</sup> If Catholics were taken out of the election equation entirely, Kerry would have won Ohio (50 percent to 49 percent) and the presidency.<sup>34</sup>

(c) *The Issue of Gay Marriage and the Black Church*

With the issue of gay marriage, Republicans saw an opportunity to infiltrate a segment of the population that had historically been resistant to their advances. Conservatives targeted the church-going segment of the African-American population as a potential source of swing votes. Using the issue of gay marriage as a rallying point, Republicans manipulated their way into the hearts and minds of many religious black voters.

Recent history is replete with attempts by right-wing organizations to engage African Americans.<sup>35</sup> “. . . [R]ight wing foundations have set about establishing and funding a number of black-run conservative organizations, and supporting a coterie of black conservative intellectuals, radio talk show hosts and pundits.”<sup>36</sup> But in the election year of 2004, Republicans drastically increased their efforts to court the church-going black vote.<sup>37</sup>

At a meeting arranged by the Coalition on Urban Renewal and Education in March of 2004, Genevieve Wood urged black Christians to speak out against gay rights activists, accusing homosexuals of attempting to equate their campaign with the civil rights struggles of African Americans.<sup>38</sup> Speaking in front of an audience of black evangelical ministers and congregation members, Wood stated that gays “are wrapping themselves in the

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32. Agiesta, *supra* note 14.

33. *Id.*

34. *Id.*

35. Bill Berkowitz, *Religious Right Plays the Race Card: Conservatives Courting African Americans for Battle against Same-Sex Marriage*, WORKING FOR CHANGE, Apr. 7, 2004, <http://www.workingforchange.com/article.cfm?ItemID=16717>.

36. *Id.*

37. Lynette Clemetson, *Both Sides Court Black Churches In the Battle Over Gay Marriage*, N.Y. TIMES, Mar. 1, 2004, at A4 (asserting “[t]he Coalition on Urban Renewal and Education, a Los Angeles-based conservative organization that works with black religions and community groups on social policy issues like school choice, arranged [a talk with Genevieve Wood, a white Republican with the Family Research Council] as well as several meetings of clergy members with the Heritage Foundation and the White House”).

38. Berkowitz, *supra* note 35.

flag of civil rights. I can make arguments against that. But not nearly like you all can.”<sup>39</sup>

The idea that homosexuals were equating gay civil rights with black civil rights outraged many African Americans.<sup>40</sup> According to Star Parker, spokeswoman for the Coalition on Urban Renewal and Education, “[w]hat’s happening right now is that the black community itself is just finding out that the homosexual movement has been using the civil rights movement to [promote its] agenda. And the black community is saying ‘[a]bsolutely not.’”<sup>41</sup> Reverend Jesse Lee Peterson of the Brotherhood Organization of a New Destiny fulminated “[w]e were discriminated against simply because we were black, not because of who we had sex with. The homosexuals are just jumping aboard the civil rights movement for their own personal gain.”<sup>42</sup>

Even Democratic members of the Congress were turned off by the comparison. Representative Arthur Davis of Alabama told the Washington Times, “[t]he civil rights movement was more of a movement for the equal rights of all Americans: education, voting rights, jobs . . . [w]hereas gay rights in terms of gay marriage is a movement for a special group of Americans. So I would not compare civil rights with gay rights.”<sup>43</sup>

Kevin Boykin, board president of the National Black Justice Coalition, recognized the comparison for the diversionary tactic it was and stated,

It doesn’t really make any difference of whether they’re the same. This whole comparison debate gets us off track. It creates this hierarchy of oppression when we start deciding this group’s suffering was worse than that group’s. At the end of the day, we should not use that as a test of whether people are entitled to equal rights under the law.<sup>44</sup>

However, with the gay marriage issue, the Republicans successfully played on the fears and sensitivities of the religious black population. Illustrating the success of this right-wing strategy, three Boston-based clergy organizations, the Black Ministerial Alliance, the Boston Ten-Point Coalition, and the Cambridge Black Pastors Conference, issued a joint statement against gay marriage. One senior pastor of a Chicago-based Baptist church told his congregation “if the KKK opposes gay marriage, I would ride with them.”<sup>45</sup>

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39. *Id.*

40. Murph, *supra* note 2.

41. Berkowitz, *supra* note 35.

42. *Id.*

43. *Id.*

44. Murph, *supra* note 2.

45. *Id.*

The Alliance for Marriage, which counts bishops from the African Methodist Episcopal Church and The Church of God in Christ among its founding members, two traditionally black denominations, oversaw the drafting of a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage.<sup>46</sup>

With its firm anti-gay/pro-morality stance, the Republican Party managed to draw in a significant segment of the traditionally Democratic-voting African-American population in the 2004 Presidential election.<sup>47</sup> Bush acquired 11 percent of the black vote nationally, 2 percent more than in 2000. Political experts believe that gay marriage was the single issue that delivered those extra 2 percentage points to the President.<sup>48</sup> In the hotly contested state of Ohio, Bush managed to snare 16 percent of the black vote.

(d) *Too Little, Too Late: The Democrats Respond*

As the campaign wore on and Bush heightened the religious rhetoric,<sup>49</sup> Kerry finally responded with his own religious posturing, for instance stating, “I don’t wear my religion on my sleeve, but faith . . . has given me values and hope to live by.”<sup>50</sup> Speaking of Vietnam, Kerry remarked,

[f]aith was much a part of our daily lives as the battle was . . . I prayed, as we all did. And I even questioned how all the terrible things that I saw could fit into God’s plan, a question many people ask. But I got through it. And I came home with a sense of hope and a belief in a higher purpose.<sup>51</sup>

Kerry’s standing among religious voters improved after the third debate wherein he began to speak of his faith, but ultimately it proved too little, too late.<sup>52</sup> The election results showed that Bush’s stance on the key moral issues of abortion and gay marriage were more aligned with church teachings across the board.<sup>53</sup> According to exit poll data, 22 percent of voters named “moral

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46. Clemetson, *supra* note 37, at A4.

47. Murph, *supra* note 2.

48. *Id.*

49. In one of many religiously-laced speeches Bush remarked: “Freedom is not America’s gift to the world. Freedom is the Almighty God’s gift to each man and woman in this world. Prayer and religion sustain me. I receive calmness in the storms of the presidency.” *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer* (PBS television broadcast, Oct. 25, 2004).

50. *Id.*

51. *Id.*

52. Waldman & Green, *supra* note 16.

53. *Id.*



values” as the most important issue in the 2004 Presidential election.<sup>54</sup> Of the 22 percent, 79 percent voted for George W. Bush.<sup>55</sup>

## II. THE SOUTHERN STRATEGY

The “Southern Strategy” is a phrase used to describe the focus of the Republican Party on winning U.S. presidential elections by securing votes from the Southern states, initially through the promotion of states’ rights.<sup>56</sup> In recent years the focus of that strategy has shifted from states’ rights to cultural values. This shift has allowed the Republican Party to expand its Southern base into the Midwestern states.

### (a) *History of the Southern Strategy*

After the Civil War, blacks were fully counted for representation, no longer considered three-fifths of a person by the U.S. government.<sup>57</sup> The Southern states thereby gained seats in Congress and became key battleground states in the national political landscape.<sup>58</sup> At the same time resentment stemming from the Civil War and Reconstruction had pushed white voters from the Republican to the Democratic Party.<sup>59</sup> The Republicans remained competitive in most elections with a voting bloc comprised primarily of blacks and highland whites.<sup>60</sup> However, after the United States withdrew federal troops from the Southern states in the Compromise of 1877 that ended Reconstruction, blacks lost protection.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, Democrats enacted the Jim Crow laws and effectively marginalized the black vote. Without its black voting base, the Republican Party could no longer compete with the Democrats; the South voted solidly Democratic until the mid-20th century.<sup>62</sup>

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54. Cable News Network, *supra* note 2.

55. *Id.*

56. Matthew M. Hoffman, *The Illegitimate President: Minority Vote Dilution and the Electoral College*, 105 YALE L.J. 935, 950 (1996).

57. Jim Chapin, *Why the GOP's Southern Strategy Ended*, Feb. 24, 2001, <http://www.newsmax.com/archives/articles/2001/2/23/172905.shtml>.

58. *Id.*

59. Hoffman, *supra* note 56, at 959.

60. Chapin, *supra* note 57.

61. W. Lewis Burke, *Post-Reconstruction Justice: The Prosecution and Trial of Francis Lewis Cardozo*, 53 S.C.L. REV. 361, 370 (2002).

62. See Hoffman, *supra* note 56, at 959.

In 1948, in response to an anti-segregation speech by Democratic Senator Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota, a group of Democratic Congressmen led by Strom Thurmond of South Carolina split from the Democratic Party and formed the segregationist States' Rights Democratic Party, otherwise known as the Dixiecrat Party.<sup>63</sup> After a failed presidential campaign by Thurmond, the Dixiecrats soon dissolved, but the tension within the Democratic Party over racial issues remained.<sup>64</sup>

In the mid-1960s the Republican Party faced its own internal tension. The 1964 Republican Party presidential primary marked a division in the party between its conservative and moderate/liberal elements.<sup>65</sup> Candidate Nelson Rockefeller of New York emerged as an acknowledged representative of the more moderate/liberal wing of the Republican Party, while Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona represented the more conservative element.<sup>66</sup> Despite his extreme conservatism, Goldwater won the party's nomination—it was a turning point towards a more conservative Republican party.<sup>67</sup>

As the Republican candidate in the 1964 presidential race, Goldwater promoted a solidly conservative agenda. In his campaign, Goldwater emphasized what he termed “states’ rights.”<sup>68</sup> Goldwater opposed any intrusion of the Federal government on traditional state domain.<sup>69</sup> In keeping with his approach to government, Goldwater took a strong stance against the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as a federal intrusion into the affairs of a state and a violation of an individual’s right to do business with whomever he chooses.<sup>70</sup>

In the 1964 election, Goldwater won all five Deep South states, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina, but carried only one other state: Arizona.<sup>71</sup> Goldwater’s stance on the Civil Rights Act of 1964 represents the first overt attempt by the Republican Party to appeal to white racist Southern voters under the guise of “states’ rights.” Beginning

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63. Chapin, *supra* note 57.

64. *See id.*

65. Cliff Schechter, *Extremely Motivated: The Republican Party's March to the Right*, 29 FORDHAM URB. L.J. 1663, 1664 (1996).

66. *Id.* at 1665.

67. *Id.*

68. *Id.*

69. *See* Jack Bass, *That old-time “Southern strategy,”* Mar. 24, 2004, [http://www.salon.com/opinion/feature/2004/03/24/southern\\_strategy/index\\_np.html](http://www.salon.com/opinion/feature/2004/03/24/southern_strategy/index_np.html).

70. Sidney Buchanan, *From Conservative Republican to Liberal Democrat: A Political Journey*, 39 HOUS. L. REV. 447, 451 (2002).

71. John O. Calmore, *Race-Conscious Voting Rights and the New Demography in a Multiracing America*, 79 N.C. L. REV. 1253, 1269 (2001).

with Goldwater in 1964, Republican presidential nominees have outpolled their Democratic opponents among Southern white voters in every election.<sup>72</sup>

*(b) Success and the Southern Strategy*

The year of 1968 proved a tumultuous one for the United States. Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated in April and race riots followed. Radical black movements sprang up throughout the country. Anti-Vietnam war protests often turned violent, and the counterculture's use of drugs caused alarm among the more conservative sectors of America. The year was also a presidential election year, and Republican candidate Richard Nixon saw an opportunity to tap into the Southern vote. With assistance from Harry Dent and Republican South Carolina Senator Strom Thurmond,<sup>73</sup> Nixon launched a campaign targeting Southern voters. Campaign themes included states' rights and a return to "law and order."<sup>74</sup> Despite accusations that he was pandering to racist Southern whites, Nixon's strategy proved successful. He carried many of the traditionally Democratic southern states and won the election.<sup>75</sup>

In his bid for re-election in 1972, Nixon again reached out to white Southern voters with a platform that used opposition to desegregation and school busing as wedge issues to appeal to white southern voters.<sup>76</sup> Nixon carried every Southern state, winning by majorities ranging from 65 percent to 78 percent.<sup>77</sup> Nixon's two victories were the first clear wins for the Southern strategy. Nixon had effectively used race as a wedge issue to appeal to white southern voters.

Riding the coattails of Nixon into Congress, Senator Jesse Helms employed his own version of the Southern strategy to become the first Republican elected to the Senate from North Carolina since Reconstruction.<sup>78</sup> Once in the fold of the Republican political machine, Helms helped secure the GOP's grip on Southern white voters. Helms became a leading proponent for issues like defunding the National Endowment for the Arts, resisting the

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72. Michael Nelson, *How the GOP Conquered the South*, CHRON. HIGHER EDUC., Oct. 21, 2005, at B15.

73. Bass, *supra* note 69.

74. Hoffman, *supra* note 56, at 958.

75. Nelson, *supra* note 72, at B15.

76. Mike Allen, *RNC Chief to Say It Was 'Wrong' to Exploit Racial Conflict for Votes*, WASH. POST, July 14, 2005, at A4.

77. Nelson, *supra* note 72, at B15.

78. *Id.*

institution of the Martin Luther King holiday, and keeping the Panama Canal in U.S. hands.<sup>79</sup> Helms also employed cultural and religious themes in order to win rural and blue-collar support.<sup>80</sup> Later, during the Carter administration, Helms rallied the previously politically quiescent white evangelical Christians to organize in opposition to Carter's proposal to withdraw tax-exempt status from predominantly white Christian schools.<sup>81</sup>

In 1980, Republican Ronald Reagan challenged Jimmy Carter's bid for re-election. Reagan's campaign, which emphasized traditional cultural values and a pro-life stance, appealed to white Southern Christians across class lines.<sup>82</sup> Reagan also revived the concept of states' rights in a speech made at a county fair in Philadelphia, Mississippi, a city in which three civil rights advocates were murdered in 1964.<sup>83</sup> Later in the campaign, Reagan praised Confederacy president Jefferson Davis in a speech at Stone Mountain, Georgia, a notorious enclave of the Klu Klux Klan.<sup>84</sup>

In a 1981 interview, Republican strategist and political consultant, Lee Atwater, explained the Southern Strategy:

You start out in 1954 by saying, "Nigger, nigger, nigger." By 1968 you can't say "nigger"—that hurts you. Backfires. So you say stuff like forced busing, states' rights and all that stuff. You're getting so abstract now [that] you're talking about cutting taxes, and all these things you're talking about are totally economic things and a byproduct of them is [that] blacks get hurt worse than whites. And subconsciously maybe that is part of it. I'm not saying that. But I'm saying that if it is getting that abstract, and that coded, that we are doing away with the racial problem one way or the other. You follow me—because obviously sitting around saying, 'We want to cut this,' is much more abstract than even the busing thing, and a hell of a lot more abstract than "Nigger, nigger."<sup>85</sup>

(c) *Evolution of the Southern Strategy*

As the Civil Rights movement gained momentum, Republicans retreated from the more obvious appeals to racist white Southerners.<sup>86</sup> For instance,

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79. *Id.*

80. *Id.*

81. *Id.*

82. Nelson, *supra* note 72, at B15.

83. Bass, *supra* note 69.

84. Irene Monroe, *Remembering Ronald Reagan's Evil Empire*, WITNESS MAG., July 9, 2004, <http://thewitness.org/agw/monroe070804.html>.

85. Bob Herbert, *Impossible, Ridiculous, Repugnant*, N.Y. TIMES, Oct. 6, 2005, at A37.

86. "Appeals based on race, [Republicans] like to think, are a thing of the past." Nelson, *supra* note

with the growing obviousness of using Federalism as a cover for racism, the strategy expanded to include cultural issues such as abortion, school prayer, and gay marriage. The Republican Party began to emphasize these cultural issues over economic issues like unemployment and health care and play on cultural differences between the conservative and liberal parts of the nation, particularly the more culturally liberal North against the more traditional South and Midwest.<sup>87</sup>

The evolution of the Southern strategy can be seen in a quote from conservative political pundit Pat Buchanan in which he describes 2004 Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry as “a Massachusetts liberal who voted against the Defense of Marriage Act, backs civil unions for homosexuals, voted to defend the infanticide known as partial-birth abortion and wants to raise the federal income taxes that George Bush lowered.”<sup>88</sup>

Republicans used the phrase “Massachusetts liberal” to describe Kerry and highlight Kerry’s alleged cultural alienness to Southern voters.<sup>89</sup> The 2004 presidential election results illustrate the divide. Excluding the Southern states, Kerry led the electoral-vote 252-133; however, the South went to Bush in a landslide 153-0, giving him the victory.<sup>90</sup>

The 2004 election results are part of an overall trend. Republican candidates have won seven of the last ten presidential elections.<sup>91</sup> Notably, the three Democratic victories belong to two Southerners, Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton.<sup>92</sup> Republican dominance is not limited to the White House. The GOP has controlled both the Senate and the House since 1994, the longest period of Republican domination since the 1920s.<sup>93</sup> “Republican dominance has also extended to the judicial branch. Since 1968 Republican presidents have made 10 of 12 Supreme Court appointments, along with 65 percent of all

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72, at B16. However, sometime these themes spring back up. Trailing in the polls behind black candidate Harvey Gantt, Senator Jesse Helms “ran a television ad that showed a white hand crumpling a rejection letter from an employer. ‘You need that job and you were the best qualified,’ the announcer intoned. ‘But they had to give it to a minority because of a racial quota. Is that really fair? Harvey Gantt says it is.’” *Id.* See also Senator Trent Lott’s comments at Strom Thurmond’s 100th birthday party on December 5, 2002. Reflecting on Thurmond’s 1948 presidential run as a candidate of the segregationist Dixiecrats, Lott commented, “Mississippians voted for him. And if the rest of the country had followed our lead, we wouldn’t have had all these problems over the years either.” *Id.*

87. See THOMAS FRANK, WHAT’S THE MATTER WITH KANSAS (Owl Books 2004).

88. Buchanan, *supra* note 1.

89. *Id.*

90. Nelson, *supra* note 72, at B14.

91. *Id.*

92. *Id.*

93. *Id.*

federal appeals-court appointments and 62 percent of all district court appointments.”<sup>94</sup> The Republican Party has gradually become the party of the majority of Southern white voters of all social and economic classes.<sup>95</sup>

The evolution of the Southern strategy has allowed the GOP to expand its voting base. Unlike states’ rights or more racially-themed efforts, traditional cultural values appeal to Midwesterners as well as Southerners. With its cultural-values appeal, the Republican Party has also successfully infiltrated much of the traditionally Democratic working-class heartland.<sup>96</sup>

### III. VALUES, IDEOLOGY, AND ECONOMIC SELF-INTEREST

In *What’s the Matter with Kansas*, Thomas Frank explores the conversion of the heartland to conservatism. Frank attempts to tackle the phenomenon of voters choosing cultural issues over their economic self-interest.<sup>97</sup>

The Democratic Party is perceived by most as “the party of workers, of the poor, of the weak and the victimized.”<sup>98</sup> Yet, some of the poorest parts of the country are voting overwhelmingly Republican.<sup>99</sup> This is the same Republican Party that pushes for cuts in social welfare spending, fights labor unions, and champions the interests of big business. The Republican economic policy platform has not changed throughout the years. The American poor, however, are not voting Republican on the basis of the GOP’s economic policies. According to Thomas Frank, they are voting on wedge issues, mostly cultural and religious, like abortion.<sup>100</sup> Liberal writers, such as Frank, believe that working class and poor people are voting against their economic self-interest.<sup>101</sup>

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94. *Id.*

95. Nelson, *supra* note 72, at B14.

96. *See generally* FRANK, *supra* note 87.

97. *Id.*

98. *Id.* at 1.

99. *Id.*; “Millions of Americans voted against their own economic interest. Of the 28 states with the lowest per-capita incomes, Bush carried 26. An administration whose overriding motive has been to protect the rich was just given a second term by the very people who will suffer the most for it.” Al From & Bruce Reed, *The Road Back*, BLUEPRINT MAG., Dec. 13, 2004, <http://www.dlc.org/print.cfm?contentid=253054>.

100. Frank writes of a friend’s previously liberal father who “was persuaded in the early nineties that the sanctity of the fetus outweighed all of his other concerns, and from there he gradually accepted the whole pantheon of conservative devil-figures: the elite media and the American Civil Liberties Union, contemptuous of our values; the la-di-da feminists; the idea that Christians are vilely persecuted-right here in the U.S. of A.” FRANK, *supra* note 87, at 4.

101. *Id.*

In *What's the Matter with Kansas*, Frank terms the shift of working-class America to conservatism the “Great Backlash.”<sup>102</sup> According to Frank, “the backlash mobilizes voters with explosive social issues—summoning public outrage over everything from busing to un-Christian art—which it then marries to pro-business economic policies. Cultural anger is marshaled to achieve economic ends.”<sup>103</sup> The backlash made the privatization, deregulation, and deunionization of today’s international free-market consensus possible.<sup>104</sup> The concept of the “Great Backlash” is not an unfamiliar one. It is simply the modern Southern strategy coupled with an economic awareness.

Today’s GOP emphasizes traditional values and downplays economic policies. The strategy’s basic premise is that “culture outweighs economics as a matter of public concern.”<sup>105</sup> Although conservative candidates deemphasize economic politics on the campaign trail, once they are in office they institute the typically conservative economic regimen of low wages, outsourcing, deregulation, tax cuts, and laissez-faire.<sup>106</sup> “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.”<sup>107</sup> Therein lies the great contradiction of the backlash: “it is a working-class movement that has done incalculable, historic damage to the working-class people.”<sup>108</sup>

In *What's the Matter with Kansas*, Frank asks the question: “Who is to blame for this landscape of distortion, of paranoia, and of good people led astray?”<sup>109</sup> Frank places most of the blame squarely on Republicans, arguing that the GOP has deluded Americans into believing that social issues matter more than bread and butter ones, contrary to their economic interest.<sup>110</sup> “The preeminent question of our times,” Frank writes, is “people getting their fundamental interests wrong.”<sup>111</sup>

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102. *Id.* at 5.

103. *Id.*

104. *Id.* “Because some artist decides to shock the hicks by dunking Jesus in urine, the entire planet must remake itself along the lines preferred by the Republican Party, U.S.A.” FRANK, *supra* note 87, at 5.

105. *Id.* at 6.

106. *Id.* at 5-6.

107. *Id.*

108. *Id.*; Daniel Gross, *Buy Stock, Vote Bush*, SLATE, Aug. 27, 2004, <http://www.slate.com/id/2105743> (pointing out that educated and wealthy liberals may often vote against their economic self interest because they prefer the Democratic stance on particular social issues).

109. FRANK, *supra* note 87, at 242.

110. *Id.* at 6.

111. *See id.* at 1.

Frank also recognizes that part of the blame belongs with liberals.<sup>112</sup> Frank criticizes some Democrats who have pushed away working-class voters for more affluent white-collar professionals who are liberal on social issues.<sup>113</sup> When Democrats do so, working-class voters realize that they have no voice in the party. In contrast, lower to working-class voters who embrace traditional values receive a voice in the Republican Party, even if it is a strictly cultural rather than economic voice.<sup>114</sup>

In order to combat this strategy, Frank believes that Democrats should resurrect the class language “that once distinguished them sharply from Republicans.”<sup>115</sup> They should not assume that people know where their economic interest lies and will act on it by instinct. “They don’t just automatically know the courses of action that are open to them, the organizations they might sign up with, or the measures they should be calling for.”<sup>116</sup> Thomas Frank advocates employing special interest groups to ignite a political movement focused on economic issues. Frank stresses the importance of unions in this potential movement. He believes liberals must get back to organizing and educating in order to teach voters where their economic interests lie.<sup>117</sup> Then the process may begin to swing voters back to voting in line with their economic self-interest. Frank recognizes that this progression will not occur overnight and he stresses patience.

Princeton economist Larry Bartels has also weighed in on the topic of voting and economic self-interest.<sup>118</sup> In his studies, Bartels has shown that voters are inherently irrational in their electoral choices.<sup>119</sup> Through his studies, Bartels has proven that voters often contradict their beliefs and interests.<sup>120</sup> According to Bartels, working-class and poor Americans are well aware of the growing income gap between rich and poor Americans<sup>121</sup> and recognize that the gap is at least in part due to high-income favoring governmental policy.<sup>122</sup> Over half of Americans hold the belief that rich

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112. *Id.* at 242.

113. *Id.* at 243.

114. *See* FRANK, *supra* note 87, at 242-43.

115. *Id.* at 245-46.

116. *Id.*

117. *Id.* at 246.

118. Larry M. Bartels, *Unenlightened Self-Interest: The Strange Appeal of Estate Tax Repeal*, THE AMERICAN PROSPECT, June 7, 2004, at A17, available at <http://www.prospect.org/web/page.ww?section=root&name=ViewPrint&articleId=7754>.

119. *Id.* at A18.

120. *Id.*

121. *Id.*

122. *Id.*



Americans are not being asked by the government to pay their fair share of income tax.<sup>123</sup> And surveys suggest the American people like “big business” less than people on welfare, liberals, feminists, and the news media.<sup>124</sup> Yet these same Americans have overwhelmingly supported the massive upward transfer of wealth by backing substantial reductions in federal income tax.<sup>125</sup> As a result of wealth-favoring tax reductions on dividends, capital gains, and estates, “the total federal tax burden in 2010 will decline by 25 percent for the richest 1 percent of taxpayers and by 21 percent for the next richest 4 percent, but by only 10 percent for taxpayers in the bottom 95 percent of the income distribution pool.”<sup>126</sup> Bartels’s theory is that voters are operating on “unenlightened self-interest.”

In his essay, Bartels illustrates his theory on voting and self-interest with the estate tax example. Bartels believes that public support for the estate tax is the most egregious example of the arguable disconnect between ordinary Americans’ beliefs on economic equality and their views on specific governmental policy.<sup>127</sup> Americans say that they are troubled by the growing income gap yet, support the repeal of a tax that is only paid by the wealthiest of heirs.<sup>128</sup> Almost 70 percent of Americans favored the repeal.<sup>129</sup> Even among citizens with household incomes of less than 50,000 dollars, 66 percent favored repeal.<sup>130</sup> The same people who want the government to spend more money on governmental programs believe the rich pay far too little in taxes, and are concerned about the growing income gap, and support the repeal overwhelmingly.

How can we explain this? Bartels argues that the answers lie in perception. Surveys show that “people who thought that *they* are asked to pay too much in federal income taxes were substantially more likely to support repealing the estate tax—despite the fact that the vast majority of them never have been or would be subject to the tax.”<sup>131</sup> The effect of citizens’ perceived tax burdens was even more substantial among lower and middle class people.<sup>132</sup>

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123. Bartels, *supra* note 118, at A17.

124. *Id.*

125. *Id.*

126. *Id.*

127. *Id.*

128. In 2002 the estate tax only applied to estates worth \$1 million or more. Bartels, *supra* note 118.

129. *Id.*

130. *Id.*

131. *Id.*

132. *Id.*

The public is radically misinformed about how the estate tax works. When a 2003 survey sponsored by National Public Radio, the Kaiser Foundation, and Harvard's Kennedy School of Government asked whether "most families have to pay the federal estate tax when someone dies or only a few families have to pay it," half the respondents said that most families have to pay, while an additional 18 percent said that they didn't know.<sup>133</sup> Two-thirds of America fails to realize the most important aspect of the estate tax: only the wealthiest of the wealthy are subject to it.<sup>134</sup> When estate tax repeal supporters were asked why they favored the repeal, more than 60 percent endorsed the statement, "[i]t affects too many people," and nearly 70 percent agreed that, "[i]t might affect YOU someday."<sup>135</sup> The results indicate that a great number of Americans support the repeal because they believe that their taxes will be lowered as a result.

Like Frank, Bartels argues for more political education so voters can more easily identify their economic self-interest and vote accordingly.<sup>136</sup> According to survey results, people who are generally well-informed about politics, recognize the growing income gap in America, and believe that economic inequality is problematic were much less likely to favor the 2001 Bush tax cuts.<sup>137</sup> And although Bartels believes political education is worthwhile, he recognizes that the effects are slow and limited.

Some Democratic strategists disagree with the theories offered by Frank and Bartels. They believe the solution to their problem lies in their own adoption of traditional values.<sup>138</sup> They advocate allowing religious groups to do more with respect to social welfare.<sup>139</sup> According to From and Reed, Democrats "must be willing to speak the rich language of faith, which can move mountains . . . . Remember that values—not programs—move nations."<sup>140</sup>

The conservative position on economic self-interest and voting is one of spin and denial. Conservatives argue that working class and poor voters are not voting against their self-interest. Conservatives believe it is not necessarily in these groups' economic interest to vote Democratic. For instance, Jonah Goldberg, in his article *It's Not Just the Wallet Stupid!*, writes,

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133. Bartels, *supra* note 118.

134. *Id.*

135. *Id.*

136. *Id.*

137. But they were not any more likely to disfavor the repeal of the estate tax. *Id.*

138. See From & Reed, *supra* note 99.

139. *Id.*

140. *Id.*

“In an age when average Joes are in the stock market and own homes at unprecedented rates, it is not obvious to me that Republican policies are contrary to their bottom lines.”<sup>141</sup> These people have aspirations of being wealthy and hope that their children become wealthy someday.<sup>142</sup> So, the argument goes, it may be logical that they support Republican policy.

Still, one must ask the questions why these people are not voting based on their present economic reality and exactly how they are going to become wealthy with the Republican economic policies in place? Apparently, these people are voting based upon their hopes and dreams. After all, if these voters win the lottery or their children miraculously shoot up the socio-economic ladder, at least they can be secured in knowing that conservative economic policies are already in place.

Conservative writers also directly attack the Democratic Party as elitist. In his article “The Oldest Fraud” Thomas Sowell argues that the Democratic Party is not the party of the poor. According to Sowell, the Democratic Party is controlled and supported by “limousine liberals” (affluent elites and intellectuals).<sup>143</sup> Sowell believes that these “limousine liberals”<sup>144</sup> are out of touch with the pulse of ordinary America.<sup>145</sup> They have the most left-wing ideologies and support the most unrealistic policies.<sup>146</sup> So by default, the party of the working-class must be the country’s conservative party.<sup>147</sup>

Conservatives further contend that issues of values and morals are simply more important to working class and poor voters. According to these conservative pundits, the Republican Party does not push to trump up appeals to traditional values; the movement comes directly from the people. Economic issues have not been marginalized by the Republican Party but instead have been marginalized by the people themselves. Working-class and poor Americans no longer care as much about issues like jobs, health care, and the minimum wage.<sup>148</sup> In voters’ minds, concerns about moral values

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141. Jonah Goldberg, *It's Not Just the Wallet, Stupid!*, NAT'L REV., Sept. 9, 2004, <http://www.nationalreview.com/goldberg/goldberg200409091205.asp>.

142. *Id.*

143. Thomas Sowell, *The Oldest Fraud*, Nov. 5, 2004, <http://www.townhall.com/opinion/columns/thomassowell/2004/11/05/13568.html>. As evidence of this, Sowell notes that Kerry had his strongest support in some of the most affluent counties of California. *Id.*

144. *Id.*

145. *Id.*

146. Sowell goes so far as to compare “limousine liberals” with Osama Bin Ladin. *Id.*

147. According to Sowell, Margaret Thatcher’s family ran a grocery store and lived upstairs over it. *Id.*

148. See Goldberg, *supra* note 141.

outweigh economic concerns. People vote or should vote on what “kind” of America they want their children growing up in and that means voting on more issues than simply narrow economic interests.<sup>149</sup> According to Jonah Goldberg, people see the government as more of a protector than a provider of social welfare.<sup>150</sup> Some see government as “a reflection of, and influence on, the society in general.”<sup>151</sup>

When addressing voting and self-interest, conservatives also raise the issue of hypocrisy—for instance Goldberg accuses liberal writers like Thomas Frank of condescension toward those who vote on broad values issues.<sup>152</sup> After all, liberals also vote against their perceived economic self-interest. Protection of the environment often economically hurts working-class people.<sup>153</sup> It is not necessarily in liberals’ self-interest to oppose the death penalty or support gay marriage.<sup>154</sup> Here, liberals too, are voting on some notion of their morals or values.

Conservative political pundits then refuse to recognize the political play the Republicans are making with the traditional values platform. But their argument that this is an organic movement lacks any basis. The American people do care about economic issues.<sup>155</sup> However, they are being distracted and divided by the Republican traditional values strategy.

Conservative writers do not address obvious overtones of racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia in the Party’s appeal to traditional values. Their positions on self-interest and voting are only designed to quash concerns and further mislead and distract the working class and poor of America.

Like the progressives of the past, in order to bring economic issues back into the political arena, Americans must work from a grass roots level. Working-class and poor citizens cannot rely upon the Democratic Party to bring forth these issues. Today, the Democratic Party is emphasizing moral values and deemphasizing economic issues. It appears that the Democratic Party political strategy is moving toward a tepid embrace of the Republican “traditional” values strategy. Working-class and poor Americans must re-embrace the concept of economic justice. They must turn within their own community and reach out to other communities to organize and mobilize.

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149. *Id.*

150. *Id.*

151. *Id.*

152. *Id.*

153. *Id.*

154. *Id.*

155. *See* survey results. Bartels, *supra* note 118.

#### IV. CONCLUSION: LESSONS FROM THE POOR PEOPLE'S CAMPAIGN

Religion today is as divisive as ever. Debates on moral issues are extremely heated. And the Republican Party has effectively used the contemporary turmoil over religion to their advantage. Conservatives have been able to use moral values as wedge issues to splinter the poor and working-class. Groups previously united in economic struggle are now splintering off, with the most religious parts of the country turning to the economically unfriendly Republican Party. Instead of evaluating and voting based upon their economic self-interest, many poor and working class people are now ignoring their economic self-interest and using their spiritual beliefs as a basis for voting. The former Democratic base of poor and working class people has been fractured and is now merely a blip on the American political radar.

While religion has undoubtedly been a divider in the American political arena, it has also served as a numbing and distracting force. Instead of concentrating on economic policy, voters are getting caught up in broad philosophical and spiritual debates. Karl Marx once said "religion is the opiate of the people." Today, Marx's comment is truer than ever. Instead of dealing with economic realities, voters are turning to religion to ease their stress over lost jobs and empty stomachs. Working class and poor people must awake from their spiritual stupor and recognize and feel what effect these conservative policies are having on themselves, their families, and their communities. Only then can economic issues rise back to the forefront of American politics.

In order for economic concerns to be addressed, working-class and poor people have to regain their power as a key constituency. To regain their power and status as an important interest group, the poor and working-class must re-unite as a voting bloc. They must learn to reject emotional appeals to traditional values. They can begin this process by turning to unions and other community organizations for support and political education. They can also look to the theories and actions of Dr. Martin Luther King for guidance.

By 1967, Dr. King had come to believe that the civil rights movement should focus more on the economic plight of blacks.<sup>156</sup> In 1966, he helped

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156. The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University, *available at* [http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/about\\_king?encyclopedia/poorpeoples.html](http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/about_king?encyclopedia/poorpeoples.html) (last visited May 21, 2006).

organize a major civil rights campaign in Washington, D.C. which rallied black inner-city residents to protest against unemployment, poor housing, and poorly-funded schools.<sup>157</sup> In 1967, King ratcheted up his fight against poverty and initiated plans for a Poor People's Campaign designed to unite poor people of all races in a struggle for economic justice.<sup>158</sup> "It must not be just black people," King stated, "it must be all poor people. We must include American Indians, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, and even poor whites."<sup>159</sup> The movement was designed to address the economic concerns of a cross-section of racial groups.<sup>160</sup> The Poor People's Campaign took the rather radical position that true social justice would require a redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor.<sup>161</sup>

The Poor People's Campaign called for a massive, widespread campaign of civil disobedience. Various protests were organized in Washington, D.C. and in other parts of the country to pressure Congress to enact an "economic bill of rights."<sup>162</sup> This Bill of Rights would have included a commitment to full employment, a guaranteed annual income provision, and more funding for low-income housing.<sup>163</sup>

In the midst of implementing the Poor People's Campaign, King went to Memphis, Tennessee to support a strike of black garbage men. There, on April 4, 1968, he was assassinated.<sup>164</sup> With King died the concept of a Poor People's Campaign. The time is now right for a renaissance of the central idea of Dr. King's Poor People's Campaign: a multiethnic coalition group of working-class/poor people to force politicians to address poverty. A movement such as this would be a powerful force in bringing economic issues like unemployment and health care to the forefront of American politics.

If employed properly, religion can be something other than a paralyzing and distracting force. It can be a powerful tool and motivating force for grassroots political movements. Dr. King provides the model for integrating religion into a political movement. In the struggle for civil rights, Dr. King used religion as a motivating force. The concept of civil disobedience was based upon notions of natural or God's law. If a civilian law violated God's law, then it was not just and it could justifiably be violated.

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157. *Id.*

158. *Id.*

159. *Id.*

160. *Id.*

161. *Id.*

162. *Id.*

163. *Id.*

164. *Id.*

In his Letter from Birmingham Jail, Dr. King encouraged the people to engage in political action:

Human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability; it comes through the tireless efforts of men willing to be co-workers with God, and without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation. We must use time creatively, in the knowledge that the time is always ripe to do right. Now is the time to make real the promise of democracy and transform our pending national elegy into a creative psalm of brotherhood. Now is the time to lift our national policy from the quicksand of racial injustice to be solid rock of human dignity.<sup>165</sup>

People were not to remain satisfied with the status quo. God's will was not to be used as an excuse for complacency. "Yes, I see the church as the body of Christ. But, oh! How we have blemished and scarred that body through social neglect and through fear of being nonconformists."<sup>166</sup> In the civil rights movement, Dr. King managed to use God as an empowering force. King appealed to commonly-held spiritual beliefs and to notions of natural law and justice. The same appeals can be made today in the movement for economic justice.

Religion can aid in the movement for economic justice. However, Americans cannot allow conservatives to continue to co-opt the role of religion in political life to make people fearful. The spiritually-inclined contingent of America must not allow religion in political life to be reduced to peripheral issues like abortion and gay marriage. Equality and economic justice must be among the new moral values.

Working-class and poor Americans need to recognize the checkered history of the traditional values political movement.<sup>167</sup> Americans cannot be blinded by their spiritual beliefs; they must recognize the detrimental effect of conservative economic policy. Recognition comes through political education. Unions and other community organizations need to be active in both the recognition and reaction process.

Reaction begins with organization and ends with protest and civil disobedience. Dr. King's model for a Poor People's Movement is a good place to start. No doubt, this will be a slow process, with no quick fix.

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165. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., *Letter From Birmingham Jail*, in *WHY WE CAN'T WAIT* 89-90 (1963) (responding to a letter from a white man which read: "And Christians know that the colored people will receive equal rights eventually, but it is possible that you are in too great a religious hurry. It has taken Christianity almost two thousand years to accomplish what it has. The teachings of Christ take time to come to earth.").

166. *Id.* at 95.

167. *See supra* Part II.

However, with tenacity and patience, a multiethnic coalition of working-class and poor interest groups can bring economic issues back to the forefront of the American political landscape.