

University of Miami Law Review

Volume 42
Number 1 *Symposium: Excluded Voices:
Realities in Law and Law Reform*

Article 7

9-1-1987

The Role of Liberal Political Culture in the Construction of Middle America

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The Role of Liberal Political Culture in the Construction of Middle America

ALLEN HUNTER*

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I. INTRODUCTION

From the late 1940's until 1968, a combination of American imperial might, economic affluence, and cultural optimism defined United States political culture. Since 1968, the United States has been in a period of crisis, breakdown, and transition.¹ New Deal and Cold War liberalism have ended in crisis; conservatism seems ascendent, but has not yet been consolidated.² The trends are confusing, especially when veneered with Reagan's "teflon." The United States economy remains dominant, yet entrepreneurial imagery coexists with capital flight, class polarization, and attacks on the welfare state. Religious fundamentalism and secular relativism contest to define the culture. Public opinion remains broadly liberal on social and eco-

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1. For useful histories of this period, see W. CHAFE, *THE UNFINISHED JOURNEY* (1986); J. GILBERT, *ANOTHER CHANCE* (1981); G. HODGSON, *AMERICA IN OUR TIME* (1976); A. MATUSOW, *THE UNRAVELING OF AMERICA* (1984); R. POLENBERG, *ONE NATION DIVISIBLE* (1980); L. WITTNER, *COLD WAR AMERICA* (1974); A. WOLFE, *AMERICA'S IMPASSE* (1981).

2. As successful as President Reagan has been at winning elections, it is unclear whether the political economy he stands for can be consolidated into a lasting accord.

conomic issues, yet electoral behavior confirms a President conservative in both areas. Opinion polls register greater tolerance for homosexuality and equality for women and blacks, yet particular policies which would advance those goals are opposed, and violence against gays, blacks, and abortion centers is rising. Hostility to supposedly oppressive state regulation coexists with continued support for environmental protection and, at least, the nonredistributive parts of the welfare state.³ No wonder political identities remain confusing and not firmly anchored.

Since 1968, Middle America has been the main group whose political identity remains unanchored. Middle Americans are characterized as economically liberal and socially conservative, and are loosely described as white, northern urban and suburban ethnic, southern, and middle and working class. Committed to the work ethic and traditional values, hostile to liberal elites and to the black, youth, feminist, and gay movements, Middle Americans have been a volatile political group for nearly two decades.⁴ Its size means that a substantial portion of its votes are necessary for the construction of a majority electoral coalition, and because it is no longer firmly identified with the Democratic Party, it is courted by politicians and political movements of various stripes.⁵ The fact that it remains electorally unanchored attests to the complexity and unsettledness of the current political setting. At the same time, the fact that (a) its own political unity is tentative, and (b) no lasting articulation between

3. Discussions of the continued liberality of public opinion include: Ferguson & Rogers, *The Myth of America's Turn to the Right*, ATLANTIC MONTHLY, May 1986, at 43; Nararro, *The 1980 and 1984 U.S. Elections and the New Deal*, in SOCIALIST REGISTER 1985-86: SOCIAL DEMOCRACY & AFTER 158-209 (R. Miliband ed. 1986); Smith & Spinrad, *The Popular Political Mood*, SOC. POL., Mar.-Apr. 1981, at 37.

4. There are many descriptions—largely politically motivated—of Middle Americans, also known as the silent majority or the real majority, dating from the late 1960's and early 1970's. See, e.g., P. BINZEN, WHITETOWN, U.S.A. (1970); R. COLES, THE MIDDLE AMERICANS (1971); R. LEMON, THE TROUBLED AMERICAN (1969) (an expansion of six articles that appeared in the October 6, 1969 issue of *Newsweek*); M. NOVAK, THE RISE OF THE UNMELTABLE ETHNICS (1972); OVERCOMING MIDDLE CLASS RAGE (M. Friedman ed. 1971); R. SCAMMON & B. WATTENBERG, THE REAL MAJORITY (1970); P. SEXTON & B. SEXTON, BLUE COLLARS AND HARD-HATS (1971); D. WARREN, THE RADICAL CENTER (1976); Warren, *The Middle American Radicals*, 219 NATION 107 (1974). For a more recent, quite openly authoritarian use of Donald Warren's analysis, see Francis, *Message from MARS: The Social Politics of the New Right*, in THE NEW RIGHT PAPERS 64 (R. Whitaker ed. 1982).

5. For prominent discussions of the electoral importance of Middle America, see P. BUCHANAN, CONSERVATIVE VOTES, LIBERAL VICTORIES (1975); W. BURNHAM, CRITICAL ELECTIONS AND THE MAINSPRINGS OF AMERICAN POLITICS (1970); E. LADD & C. HADLEY, TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE AMERICAN PARTY SYSTEM (1975); K. PHILLIPS, THE EMERGING REPUBLICAN MAJORITY (1970); W. RUSHER, THE MAKING OF THE NEW MAJORITY PARTY (1975); R. SCAMMON & B. WATTENBERG, *supra* note 4; Francis, *supra* note 4.

its social and political identities has been consolidated, contributes to the unsettledness of the period. Only if its social and political identities are clearly aligned within an electoral coalition—or if Middle America breaks up as a significant social category as its members affiliate with other aligned social and political groups—can a new stable political order be constituted.⁶

The late 1960's divides the era of the American suburban dream from that of the Middle American nightmare.⁷ The dealignment of Middle Americans from the Democratic Party took place in 1968, and even more decisively, in 1972.⁸ From the late 1940's until the mid-1960's, white, middle-class families, organized around traditional sex roles, rectitude, and hard work, had symbolized the American dream. Ideologically, they were presented as the center of the American Century, those who made it work, and those who properly reaped the benefits. Yet within the space of a few years, from the mid-1960's to the early 1970's, their status was challenged as the politics and culture of liberal capitalist America came unbound. The combination of liberal capitalist successes in the United States (e.g., commodity-driven prosperity, the extensions of rights and liberties to new

6. Periods of firm political alignment in which majority and minority electoral coalitions remain fairly consistent from one election to another characterize the history of United States electoral politics. Dealignment periodically follows, in which one or more social groups break from the majority coalition and vote for the other party. If enough voters shift their allegiance, they confer majority status upon the other party. With the parties realigned, a new electoral coalition comes into being, and different policies are legitimated within an altered political culture. But when critical swing groups, such as Middle America, do not shift decisively, then the period of dealignment continues. The current period of dealignment has outlasted previous periods, and some commentators believe this is an indication of a deeper structural crisis in American society and its polity, which a political realignment may not be able to resolve. For the classic article on critical elections, see Key, *A Theory of Critical Elections*, 17 J. POL. 3 (1955). For a clear discussion of the history of critical elections, see generally W. BURNHAM, *supra* note 5; REALIGNMENT IN AMERICAN POLITICS 329-52 (B. Campbell & R. Trilling eds. 1980) (containing a bibliography on critical elections and electoral realignments). For discussion of the current period that suggest that a realigning election may not be in the offing, see K. PHILLIPS, POST-CONSERVATIVE AMERICA (1982) and Burnham, *The 1984 Election and the Future of American Politics*, in ELECTION 84, at 204-60 (E. Sandoz & C. Crabb eds. 1985).

7. For a description of the late 1960's as a watershed era, see G. HODGSON, *supra* note 1, at 353-98 (focusing on the political and cultural significance of the events of 1968); W. CHAFE, *supra* note 1, at 343-80 (same). For a compelling approach to cultural politics in Britain in the 1960's, but with relevance to the United States, see S. HALL, C. CRITCHER, T. JEFFERSON, J. CLARKE & B. ROBERTS, *POLICING THE CRISIS* (1978).

8. While Middle Americans did not firmly attach themselves to the Republican Party as Kevin Phillips had predicted, they did break from the Democratic Party. See K. PHILLIPS, *supra* note 6, at 53-62. For discussion of the electoral significance of Middle American voters in 1968 and 1972, see T. WHITE, *THE MAKING OF THE PRESIDENT 1968* (1969); T. WHITE, *THE MAKING OF THE PRESIDENT 1972* (1973); G. HODGSON, *supra* note 1, at 384-98; E. LADD & C. HADLEY, *supra* note 5.

groups, and expansions of welfare provisions) *and* its failures (e.g., the economically and morally costly war in Vietnam, the limited extent of civil rights reforms, and the elite, arrogant, statist manner in which many reforms were instituted) were profoundly unsettling to many social traditionalists in the late 1960's. Core constituencies of the American dream came to feel marginalized and excluded from the world they believed they had created.⁹ Not questioning the basic structures or imperatives of capitalism or nationalism, they nonetheless registered broad distrust of many major institutions, dissented from a wide range of policies, and evinced hostility toward established elites.¹⁰ Yet quite quickly, most of their animus came to be focused politically on blacks, youth, women, gays, and liberal elites, largely because of their support for the others. As the focus of resentments and hostility was narrowed and unified, a conservative populist sensibility was constituted through a series of binary oppositions: us/them, white/black, silent/raucous, moral/permissive, lawful/lawless, orderly/disruptive, and productive/unproductive. Cumulatively these rhetorical dualities implied that an unholy alliance of subordinates, subversives, and elite liberals had created a perverse inversion by which the silent majority of real Americans had been excluded by permissive, unproductive minorities who had usurped control of the nation's politics and culture.¹¹

Middle America crystallizes a structure of feelings and perceptions that raises an important question: How are we to understand protestations of powerlessness and loss of control phrased as attacks on people with even less power and control? How are we to understand the meanings of inclusion and exclusion, of domination and subordination, when social hierarchies are rhetorically reversed and social consciousness seems so disconnected from social being? How do we empathize with the very real sense of dislocation and disempowerment when most Middle American anger opposes democratic extensions of rights, increased tolerance, and slight improvements in the welfare state? How do we sympathize with a sense of exclusion and displacement when whites complain about blacks, men about women, straights about gays, families about single people, the comfortable about the poor? Analytically, we have to be willing to confront the antidemocratic, repressive, racist and sexist elements in Middle America and also understand the real hurt its

9. See *supra* note 4.

10. See S. LIPSET & W. SCHNEIDER, *THE CONFIDENCE GAP* 291-333 (1983).

11. For a self-conscious discussion of how to invoke these divisions to help create a conservative electoral majority, see W. RUSHER, *THE MAKING OF A NEW MAJORITY PARTY* (1975).

members have experienced, their hostilities to bureaucratic domination and elite manipulation, and desires for meaningful community.¹² Viewed favorably, Middle American politics seeks no more than to recover the rewards of suburban pastoralism, which is still viewed as the sociocultural distillation of the American Century; in this perspective, Middle America's members merely want to retrieve the political cultural setting in which they were accorded the respect they deserve. Viewed more critically, the attempt to recuperate that idealized moment necessarily recreates patterns of domination and hierarchy, exclusion and oppression, and cultural narrowness and moralism, which we can now see were inscribed in the political culture of the suburban dream. To understand how people at the center of the political and cultural mainstream rapidly became responsive to appeals that stress their marginality, it is important to look at the historical context in which those appeals are made. My argument is not just that conservative rhetorical appeals to Middle America became effective as liberalism collapsed. It is also that the social groups of Middle America and the cultural appeals made to them were, to a large extent, created by the economic, social, and political dynamics of the early phase of post-war liberalism. When liberalism became responsive to new political and cultural dynamics in the 1960's, many of those in the mainstream came to feel abandoned and open to conservative interpretations of their plight.

II. MIDDLE AMERICA AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT

I suggest an approach to the emergence of Middle America that differs from most interpretations. Most writing about Middle America naturalistically assumes that Middle America was *discovered* in the late 1960's.¹³ Those who claim to have discovered Middle America include Middle Americans themselves, conservative political elites intent on capturing their support, neoconservative intellectuals seeking a social group in whose name they can criticize liberal and radical political and cultural trends, and journalists of various political stripes.¹⁴ A composite Middle American couple was even the

12. Kenneth Burke proposes that "a comic frame of motives" allows one to combine critical distance and empathy in considering the actions of those with whom one agrees *or* disagrees. K. BURKE, *ATTITUDES TOWARD HISTORY* 166-75 (1984).

13. For instance, Godfrey Hodgson, who has written perceptively about United States cultural politics, entitles chapter 19 of his book, *The Discovery of Middle America*. G. HODGSON, *supra* note 1.

14. For discussion of how these various groups treated Middle America, see A. Hunter, *Virtue with a Vengeance: The Pro-Family Politics of the New Right* 74-135 (June 1984) (unpublished doctoral dissertation, presented at The Faculty of the Graduate School of the Arts and Sciences, Brandeis University).

Time Man and Woman of the Year in 1970.¹⁵ In contrast, I argue that Middle America was as much *invented* as it was discovered.¹⁶ Indeed, it was politically and rhetorically constructed by many of the same people who claim to have discovered it.

I will thus take a constructivist—as opposed to naturalistic or essentialist—approach to the emergence of Middle America as a salient category of politics. Yet many constructivist arguments tend to contain errors of a rather different sort. Although not inherent in constructivist arguments, many tend to focus on contingency and indeterminacy, rhetorical and linguistic construction of identities, and fragmented, discontinuous qualities of social life. As reactions to determinism and essentialism, these are understandable emphases; but in themselves, they do not generate an adequate framework for explaining social and political phenomena. This perspective properly emphasizes the power of rhetoric, but does not attend enough to the rhetoric of power, that is, to the ways in which routinized, institutionalized social relations set limits on the power of rhetoric and create contexts in which people act politically.¹⁷

Theoretically then, I situate myself between the orthodoxies of determinism and naturalism and the new orthodoxy of discursivity, social construction, and indeterminacy. Socially constructed though they are, social relations, cultural patterns, and political practices do take on lives of their own, and the past does set parameters on what is possible in the present. Rhetoric that successfully influenced social and political behavior can itself become objectified and can constrain the power of rhetoric in the present. This position, which I believe welcomes the theoretical flexibility of constructivist arguments without accepting their substantive tilt toward thorough indeterminacy, addresses a weakness in critical legal studies noted by David Trubek. He sees the assumption that “legal consciousness affects those who

15. *Man and Woman of the Year: The Middle Americans*, *TIME*, Jan. 5, 1970, at 10.

16. To be fair, some discussions of Middle America do recognize that it was not a fixed entity out there waiting to be discovered; commentators tend to hold the media and conservative politicians responsible for creating the image of a cohesive group of Middle Americans. The argument of this paper is that these treatments are not wrong, but partial. For instance, Byron Shafer and Richard Larson argue that law and order as the “social issue” was largely a creation of television. Shafer & Larson, *Did TV Create the ‘Social Issue’?*, *COLUM. JOURNALISM REV.*, Sept.-Oct. 1972, at 10. Samuel Lubell wrote that the silent majority was “an advertising creation” used by President Nixon to influence “who and what is to be made visible.” S. LUBELL, *THE HIDDEN CRISIS IN AMERICAN POLITICS* 66 (1971).

17. For a treatment of the constitution of social blocs from a perspective of radical indeterminacy, see E. LACLAU & C. MOUFFE, *HEGEMONY AND SOCIALIST STRATEGY* (1985); Hunter, Review Essay, 17 *THEORY & SOC’Y* — (1988) (critical review of E. LACLAU & C. MOUFFE, *supra*).

live in it,"¹⁸ i.e., law creates its subjects, as unsubstantiated. He believes that "[u]ntil we can produce convincing maps of the relationships between elite ideological production, the social definition of meaning, and the history of social relations, we will not be able to sustain the claims made for Critical Studies."¹⁹ One way of drawing such "maps" is by detailing the processes by which "elite ideological production" results from self-interested responses by elites to pressures and demands of existing social groups that become embedded in public policies and laws. In this perspective, policies and laws are not the products solely of elites, but are produced by conflicts and compromises between various groups. The policies and laws, then, do partially construct their subjects.

In other words, we need a materialist account of the power of rhetoric *and* of the rhetoric of power to avoid an exaggerated sense of the domain of language and unwarranted assumptions about the reception of "elite ideological production." Such an account of Middle America entails grounding language and reveals the symbolic action encoded within material social relations; it notes that the structures of power within a cultural and political economy forcefully "speak" to people about which courses of action are realistically available to them and which are not. To the extent that Middle America was invented, its identity is defined not only by the options it was encouraged to choose, but also by those options that were discouraged or foreclosed.

The recent theoretical emphasis on flux and indeterminacy is compelling in transitional times such as the present. But in other periods, very similar processes have become congealed into durable patterns. During these periods, social and political identities have been more fixed and predictable, which is not to say they have a more straightforward relationship to social being. In United States history, periods of stability have been characterized by the weaving together of diverse trends and developments into discernible sets of interests and cultural frames which purportedly serve, are viewed as legitimate by, and actually help constitute, electoral coalitions. In such periods, majority electoral coalitions are an element of hegemonic social blocs. Periods of transition are characterized by the nonexistence of social blocs and the coexistence of diverse strands of public policy, public opinion, and economic and cultural trends which do not cohere. Thus, political rhetoric is more important because it weaves together

18. Trubek, *Where the Action Is: Critical Legal Studies and Empiricism*, 36 STAN. L. REV. 575, 610 (1984).

19. *Id.* at 612.

temporary electoral coalitions; coalitions cannot "naturally" arise out of fixed blocs with well defined interests that do not exist. In periods of stability, political identities remain fairly consistent, while in periods of transition, the opposite is true. There is more "play" in periods of transition, yet the way in which periods of stability come unraveled helps create the range of possible identities in periods of transition. Thus, to understand how Middle America was invented, we have to look at the context from which it arose.

Substantively, my argument is that dominant political and economic structures and elites help create political identities even when they are not involved in mobilizing people with those identities. Responsibility for the construction of Middle America thus extends to the structures of the economy; to hegemonic, but not static, liberal political discourse of the 1950's and 1960's, that discouraged questioning of class relations and only halfheartedly embraced the cultural and political goals of blacks, women and others; and to elite-dominated, cross-class, political coalitions in which the elites shifted their alliances with other sectors of the society as their own political priorities changed. Ironically, the collusion of political liberals with the structures and imperatives of capitalism help explain why backlash movements attack liberals, intellectuals, and state functionaries, but not capitalists. In naturalizing capitalist social relations, in deflecting hostilities from the structures of capitalism, they help direct those hostilities not only at oppressed groups, but also at themselves. The Middle American identity began to form as its members felt they had been politically and culturally abandoned and as the dynamics of liberal capitalism seemed to marginalize their concerns. Secondly, their conservative populist identity was actively encouraged and given clarity when conservative political elites sought their support for a rightward realignment on a new basis within a conservative coalition. Third, a series of backlash social movements—which arose in response to liberal and radical politics of the 1960's—constituted active mobilizing expressions of Middle America.

Thus, Middle America is constituted at two levels: as people engaged in varied social practices, and as a cluster of texts. It is both an actual group of people *and* a cluster of images. The term Middle America has two distinct but mutually reinforcing meanings. On the one hand, it refers to a broad, diffuse, shifting grouping of people which may be in the process of consolidating a clear political identity. On the other hand, Middle America refers to a complex of images and symbols, resentments and longings, condensed into a political sensibility that is purportedly held by those Middle Americans. Neither the

particular social bloc nor the sensibility would fully exist without the other. Middle America is constructed through social and symbolic actions that integrate traits with people. In that sense, Middle America exists more fully in the collective written text *about* it, rather than in the daily lives of those who are said to compose it. Yet to the extent Middle Americans do not reject the text, but in fact see themselves in it, they do become more like it, especially when other options are limited.

III. THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF BIPARTISAN GROWTH

The period from the end of World War II through the early 1970's was the longest period of sustained economic growth in the history of world capitalism, and, with all its limitations, it was also the longest period of liberal democratic rule in capitalist nations.²⁰ During those years, the United States was the hegemonic economic, political and military power. Its supremacy rested on "a host of key industries: international oil, computers, electronics, aircraft, automobiles, many agricultural commodities, and both investment and commercial finance."²¹ These economic strengths were articulated within a new "*social structure of accumulation . . . the specific institutional environment within which the capitalist accumulation process is organized.*"²² It is composed of several prominent features: the broadly shared goal of sustained economic growth, Keynesianism, elite pluralist democracy, an imperial America engaged in a cold war, the ideology of anticommunism at home and abroad, stability or incremental change in race relations, and a stable, "traditional" home life in a buoyant, commodity-driven consumer culture. Together these crystallized into a set of social and political institutions and a broad consensus for two decades. It was politically held together by a bipartisan growth coalition, and culturally symbolized by suburban pastoralism—a privatized, homogeneous, "middle-classless" society of white nuclear families.²³

20. For discussion of this period of capitalism, see sources cited *supra* note 1. For the most analytic treatment, see A. WOLFE, *supra* note 1.

21. Ferguson & Rogers, *The Reagan Victory: Corporate Coalition in the 1980 Campaign*, in *THE HIDDEN ELECTION* 3, 9 (T. Ferguson & J. Rogers eds. 1981).

22. D. GORDON, R. EDWARDS & M. REICH, *SEGMENTED WORK, DIVIDED WORKERS* 9 (1982) [hereinafter D. GORDON]. For a fuller introduction to the concept of the social structure of accumulation, see *id.* at 22-26; Gordon, *Stages of Accumulation and Long Economic Cycles*, in *PROCESSES OF THE WORLD SYSTEM* 9-45 (T. Hopkins & I. Wallerstein eds. 1980).

23. For an example of a book organized around an analysis of the politics of growth, see A. WOLFE, *supra* note 1. For a discussion of pastoralism, see L. MARX, *THE MACHINE IN THE GARDEN* (1964).

A. *Labor-Capital Accord*

Central to the postwar social structure of accumulation was a "capital-labor accord" which "represented, on the part of labor, the de facto acceptance of the logic of profitability and markets as the guiding principles of resource allocation . . . in return for an assurance that minimal living standards, trade union rights, and liberal democratic rights would be protected."²⁴ From the labor legislation of the 1930's through the late 1940's, labor was incorporated as a legitimate voice within politics as long as it accepted a subordinate status.²⁵ Management was accorded the right to control the labor process, and the working class standard of living was to rise along with labor productivity. The accord acknowledged that the existing division of wealth was legitimate and to be maintained; workers were to get more as they created more, not as they were able to wrest it from capital. The accord undercut class mobilization, and institutionalized labor within unions reconstituted as political interest groups, thereby modifying the linkage between the social relations of work and political identities. Through political incorporation, unions became interest groups, lobbying and bargaining electorally, and seldom exercising collective power at the point of production. Bureaucratized unions divided organized and unorganized sectors of the working class. Labor leaders came to have interests that overlapped with, but were also distinct from, their constituents, especially as they were drawn into elite pluralist political processes.²⁶ This class accord was articu-

24. Bowles, *The Post-Keynesian Capital-Labor Statement*, SOCIALIST REV., Sept.-Oct. 1982, at 45.

25. As Professor Gordon explains :

The new social structure of accumulation that emerged from this period thus necessarily reflected class compromise and explicitly incorporated a new level of working-class power. It was rooted in five central pieces of legislation or treaty: the Social Security Act, which provided the main underpinning to the welfare state; the Wagner Act, which legalized the rights of workers to independent unions; the Taft-Hartley Act, which restricted union weapons such as secondary boycotts, purged union leaders who were Communists, and in general limited the effectiveness of the union's industrial (strike) powers to bargaining within individual industries; the Employment Act of 1946, which committed the federal government to antidepression policies; and, finally, the Bretton Woods monetary system, which promoted world trade and placed the dollar in the advantageous position of a privileged international reserve currency.

D. GORDON, *supra* note 22, at 169-70.

26. For the classic argument along these lines, see R. MICHELS, *POLITICAL PARTIES* (1959). Recent discussions that stress the incorporative imperatives which follow from the routinization of working class struggles include: M. DAVIS, *PRISONERS OF THE AMERICAN DREAM* (1986); A. PRZEWORSKI, *CAPITALISM AND SOCIAL DEMOCRACY* (1985); Brenner, *The Paradox of Social Democracy: The American Case*, in *THE YEAR LEFT 32-86* (M. Davis, F. Pfeil & M. Sprinker eds. 1985).

lated with forms of labor market segmentation that maintained racially and sexually discriminatory practices. To challenge these inequalities, blacks and women were to adopt the very kinds of methods that labor had cast aside. Thus, to the extent that the accord's routinized practices became a standard for judging the demands and methods of other groups, it is understandable—not justifiable, perhaps, but understandable—why many white, male workers would see black and feminist demands for equity as unfair and illegitimate.²⁷ The political incorporation of labor through legal reforms, which modified capitalist imperatives and wedded, fragmented, and routinized class struggle, helped construct a context in which routinized electoral procedures, not mass mobilizations, became the accepted practice for realizing sectoral interests.²⁸

Politically, this accord fit with the vision of classless, domestic consensus; enemies were projected externally. As Alan Wolfe has argued, "Instead of making a political choice, America opted for an economic surrogate. A bipartisan coalition was formed to pursue economic expansion, at home through growth and overseas through empire."²⁹ This impulse was not as peculiar to the postwar period as Wolfe suggests. Its historically specific qualities are marked by a bipartisan political coalition committed to state action to sustain growth, the particular rewards it offered in the area of private consumption, and the fact that it was taking place in a period of American economic, political, and military supremacy. But the tendency to displace class conflict and moral and cultural concerns by economic rewards has a long history.³⁰ This is one of the reasons many Americans associate democracy with freedom of choice for individuals

27. This suggests a counterreading to Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's argument that democratic impulses are spread through logics of equivalence across different fields of social action. See E. LACLAU & C. MOUFFE, *supra* note 17, at 149-94, *passim*. Although some blacks, women, and white male militants sought to extend democratic practices from their insurgent activities back into unions and work relations, those workers who did not resist the accord could instead see these mobilizations as procedurally improper and as pleas for special treatment. What counts as legitimate democratic procedure is contested.

28. Mike Davis writes that "collective bargaining fine-tuned the countervailing influences of management and labor, while expanding the ambit of interest-group democracy into the workplace itself." M. DAVIS, *supra* note 26, at 102.

29. A. WOLFE, *supra* note 1, at 10.

30. William Appleman Williams has dedicated much of his work to arguing that America's "Great Evasion" is founded on using "Empire as a Way of Life" to displace political choices that could only be resolved through sharp domestic political conflict. See W. WILLIAMS, *THE CONTOURS OF AMERICAN HISTORY* (1961); W. WILLIAMS, *EMPIRE AS A WAY OF LIFE* (1980); W. WILLIAMS, *THE GREAT EVASION* (1964). In addition, John F. Kasson has argued that technologically-driven growth promised the reward of economic well-being as a substitute for the political virtues of republicanism. See J. KASSON, *CIVILIZING THE MACHINE* (1976).

rather than with collective decisionmaking, *even though* increased individual freedom has often led Americans, and especially workers, to opt for collective action. The bipartisan political collaboration around growth shifted political power upward and discouraged popular mobilization.³¹ For most white people, their temporary satisfaction with the economy and general state of society meant that they did not protest the increased bureaucratization of politics and the enlarged domain of experts. When the state assists in the promotion of broadly desired economic growth, most people perceive state actions as natural and unintrusive.

B. Suburbanization

Domestically, the accord was articulated around suburbanization.³² Liberal politicians and governmental policies contributed to the creation of the postwar gender/generation/family order that has more recently been nostalgically invoked by conservatives. At the center of suburban life was the so-called traditional nuclear family of Mom, Dad, and the kids; Dads commuted to work, Moms took care of the kids who frolicked in their yard when not being driven here and there by their Mom.³³ This suburban, middle-class family was presented as the natural unit of society, upon which the rest of the social order rested, and for which it was organized.³⁴ Yet that view of the family as natural missed the extent to which this particular version of the family was a social historical construct. Just as the government had opened up the territories and removed the Indians for all those "Little Houses on the Prairie," so too, suburban growth was the result of political decisions as well as economic forces. These decisions included government-financed home-loans, and federal involvement in highway construction. In this manner, the political discourse of the powerful quite literally became concrete and shaped the material lives of the many.³⁵ The political economy of suburbanization

31. Wolfe writes that a politics of growth arose from "organized interest groups, not mobilization from below." A. WOLFE, *supra* note 1, at 24. For more general discussions of interest-group liberalism, see T. LOWI, *THE END OF LIBERALISM* (1979) and A. WOLFE, *THE LIMITS OF LEGITIMACY* (1977).

32. The importance of the suburbs in postwar America is widely noted. See, e.g., W. CHAFE, *supra* note 1, at 111-45; K. JACKSON, *CRABGRASS FRONTIER* 231-45 (1985); R. POLENBERG, *supra* note 1, at 127-63; G. WRIGHT, *BUILDING THE DREAM* 240-61 (1981).

33. For discussion of the normative family of the 1950's, see J. GILBERT, *supra* note 1, at 54-75; J. Demos, *Images of the American Family. Then and Now*, in *CHANGING IMAGES OF THE FAMILY* 43 (V. Tufte & B. Myerhoff eds. 1979) (historicizing the normative family and revealing the conflicting values and tensions within the postwar normative family).

34. For a clear presentation of naturalistic assumptions in the normative American family, see D. SCHNEIDER, *AMERICAN KINSHIP* (1968).

35. "To a significant degree," Professor Wolfe writes, "the postwar suburban boom, was a

and a renewed emphasis on family and home were mutually supportive. The further commodification of material life—especially housing, automobiles, and major appliances, which imply each other in the context of privatized suburban homes—linked macroeconomics and social and cultural commitments to stable family life and deepened the association between economic dynamism and cultural stability.

Suburban pastoralism was for *white* families.³⁶ Racial segregation was also consolidated as a practice and as a cultural norm, if not in explicit political ideology, within the social accord. In fact, the degree of housing segregation increased because of patterns determined by the politics of the national growth coalition as well as by conservative economic forces such as the real estate industry. In leaving the cities, millions of white Americans were seeking not only cultural and class homogeneity, but also racial homogeneity. Although the racial dimension of suburbanization was not new in the 1950's,³⁷ suburbanization in the 1950's and 1960's radically increased racial segregation. As cities lost whites and gained blacks, "in the suburbs whites outnumbered blacks by a ratio of more than thirty-five to one. The nation at times seemed to be the scene of a gigantic game of leap-frog, with white migrants to the suburbs one or two jumps ahead of black migrants to the cities."³⁸

Like suburbanization itself, its patterns of racial segregation were not only determined by a series of choices by white individuals, influenced by racial prejudice and anonymous market mechanisms, but were actively constituted politically by interest groups within the growth coalition. Originally initiated in the late 1940's to provide housing for the needy, housing policy quickly became part of the more general emphasis on growth in which the needs of the poor and black were sacrificed.³⁹ Although racially restrictive covenants were rendered unenforceable, but not illegal per se, in 1948,⁴⁰ federal efforts to combat discrimination only became law as part of the Civil Rights

product of Title II of the Housing Act of 1949. . . . Politically, suburbanization had the effect of guaranteeing the bipartisan character of the growth coalition." A. WOLFE, *supra* note 1, at 95; see K. JACKSON, *supra* note 32, at 190-218 (addressing the role of the federal government in promoting suburban development).

36. Polenberg writes, "Suburbanization encouraged the growth of a racially segmented society, offering a classic example of how demographic trends could work at cross-purposes with constitutional, political, and social change." R. POLENBERG, *supra* note 1, at 163. Yet as Polenberg himself shows, it was not neutral "demographic trends" that furthered racial segregation, but political choices that were in tension with the stated liberal goals of racial equality. *Id.* at 150-63.

37. See H. PRESTON, *AUTOMOBILE AGE ATLANTA* 74-112 (1979).

38. R. POLENBERG, *supra* note 1, at 150.

39. A. WOLFE, *supra* note 1, at 84-88.

40. *Shelley v. Kraemer*, 334 U.S. 1 (1948).

Act of 1968, passed in the wake of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination.⁴¹ "The dramatic split between nearly all-white suburbs and increasingly black central cities did not just happen. This movement has been promoted by public policies, including Federal Housing Administration (FHA) approval of loans to restricted subdivisions, local restrictive zoning laws, and the efforts of the private real estate industry to avoid racial integration."⁴² The lending and redlining policies of the FHA combined with the practices of private realtors to increase racial segregation.

IV. THE COLLAPSE OF BIPARTISAN GROWTH-POLITICS

Although numerous changes modified the political and cultural arrangements within the social structure of accumulation, and hence the quality of life for members of the society, its basic structures remained intact until the late 1960's and early 1970's when it was thrown into disarray. When it broke up, the way of life associated with it was also thrown into question; for instance, home ownership is possible for fewer people now than two decades ago, the stable nuclear family is no longer a hegemonic cultural norm, children cannot assume they will do better economically than their parents, the myth of classlessness is being threatened by economic polarization, and unions within core industries are threatened as private-sector trade union membership declines. The new social structure of accumulation which will eventually emerge out of this lengthy transitional period will depend not only on changes in capital-labor relations, but also on the configuration of economic, political, and socio-cultural choices made within the United States. Indeed, while suburban population grew in the 1970's, suburbia is no longer a central, resonant cultural symbol.⁴³

Critical to the decline of the postwar social structure of accumulation was the world crisis of capitalism of the past fifteen years.⁴⁴ Important as they are, however, analyses of the decomposition and reconstruction of the world political economy are often—although not necessarily—determinist and economist. Still, in rejecting determinist and reductive assumptions, it is too easy to slide into unwar-

41. D. NEWMAN, N. AMIDEI, B. CARTER, D. DAY, W. KRUVANT & J. RUSSELL, *PROTEST POLITICS, AND PROSPERITY* 135, 141 (1978).

42. *Id.* at 143.

43. For a discussion of continued demographic growth in suburbia in a different economic and social context, see M. BALDASSARE, *TROUBLE IN PARADISE* (1986).

44. See e.g., M. CASTELLS, *THE ECONOMIC CRISIS AND AMERICAN SOCIETY* (1980); M. DAVIS, *supra* note 26; Bowles, *supra* note 24; Bowles & Gintis, *The Crisis of Liberal Democratic Capitalism: The Case of the United States*, 11 *POL. & SOC'Y* 51 (1982).

ranted assumptions of indeterminacy. A position that stresses the joint influences of economic relations, political contestations, and discursive formations in the constitution of a social totality is not antithetical to all forms of determinism. In disassociating himself from such a position, Trubek defines determinism as

the view that fundamental laws govern the social world. Social life, like the interaction of molecules and the rotation of planets, obeys certain laws. These laws give society its deep logic and exist irrespective of our wills. Social science, in this view, reveals the objective conditions which determine our fate.⁴⁵

In this formulation, there is no space for will, agency, or action; it leads one to opt for indeterminacy. Yet there is another meaning of determinism adopted by Marx that stresses that people make their own history "under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past."⁴⁶ Marx argues that the past constrains how people can act in the present, but he makes no claims about how the past was constructed. The past was constituted rhetorically *and* economically, by self-conscious political actors *and* by more anonymous economic forces; but once these are crystallized into durable practices and beliefs, they do have power over us, especially when the more powerful among us benefit from those patterns. People with limited resources exist within confined circumstances; their choices are limited, i.e., determined. Thus, social configurations that were actively constructed surely are felt as determined from the perspectives of people who suffer the inequities of power imbalances. The rhetoric of power speaks powerfully to people in ways that set limits on the power of rhetoric.⁴⁷

A. *Middle America is "Discovered"*

There is a tendency to detail the economic *sources* of transitional periods, and then expand the analysis to include contingent political and sociocultural forces to account for the moment of crisis or transition.⁴⁸ Such a view might properly, but partially, point to those ele-

45. Trubek, *supra* note 18, at 579.

46. K. MARX, *THE 18TH BRUMAIRE OF LOUIS BONAPARTE* 15 (Int'l Publishers ed. 1963).

47. In fact, if overly determinist arguments feed passivity by underestimating the social space for choice, then facile arguments against determinism easily fall into moralistic exhortations demanding that people change more than one reasonably can expect. Because liberal and radical professionals often feel more empowered than working and middle class people—because they are—they have a tendency to ignore the greater constraints that operate in the lives of other people. In this way, many issues that well-off liberals see as articulated by sexual, cultural, or national concerns may be viewed by working class people as cultural impositions by an arrogant, condescending elite.

48. See, e.g., M. CASTELLS, *supra* note 44, at 138-214. Professor Castells richly describes

ments in the construction of Middle America that portray its conservative, populist break with liberalism as the result of actions from above, not restiveness from below. In the context of the exhaustion of liberalism, for instance, Governor Wallace and President Nixon used populist rhetoric to seek the support of those who had tended to vote as mainstream liberals, and in doing so helped to create Middle America. They did not seek to create populist *movements*, but to use populist *language* to reconstitute electoral coalitions.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, a series of backlash populist social movements, fueled by socially traditionalist concerns, also arose which challenged the liberal electoral coalition in another way; they revealed the decreased salience of party politics altogether. Attention to social and cultural factors only in contingent moments cannot explain social movement activism or the receptivity of people to political rhetoric.

By the late 1960's, many Middle Americans-to-be were becoming discontent with the quite dramatic changes in the political culture. They objected to the cultural and political concerns of the civil rights, student, antiwar, and women's movements and were resentful of the attention these movements garnered. Their animosity to these movements was couched in antistatism and anti-elitism—as well as racism, national chauvinism, moralistic indignation, and antifeminism—because they, understandably, saw the Great Society and the liberal decisions of the Warren Court as aligned with these dissident political movements and cultural tendencies. Liberal culture, liberal policies, and the liberal electoral coalition were all implicated as sources of their resentments. The manner in which racial, gender, and generational changes were politically articulated divided the liberal voting bloc and marginalized those who had been celebrated in the earlier American Dream.

Observing this discontent, Julius Lester generously wrote in 1969, that

[t]he truly alienated American was not the intellectual with his existential dilemmas, not the blacks, and not the young. These groups were alienated from the centers of power, but they were at least articulate and becoming organized. The vast majority of Americans were, however, silent and unknown. It was to them

racial divisions in the working class, yet gives an economic explanation of the unfolding of the crisis, and then a nod to how conservative politicians could use race in articulating a right wing populism.

49. On the distinction between populist movements and populist language, see M. CANOVAN, *POPULISM* 260-88 (1981); Mouzelis, *Ideology and Class Politics: A Critique of Ernesto Laclau*, 112 *NEW LEFT REV.*, Nov.-Dec. 1978, at 45.

that George Wallace came. . . .⁵⁰

President Nixon and Vice-President Agnew joined Governor Wallace in courting that "vast majority of Americans" and helping them define themselves as the silent majority or Middle America. Their carefully crafted populist rhetoric helped to give form and content to the amorphous feelings and concerns that Scammon and Wattenberg referred to as the "social issue," which was "a cluster of fears that were said to afflict the average American voter as he went about his daily life, and included fear of drug addicts, and rising crime rates, fear of school busing and of black people who might move into white neighborhoods, and fear of radical demonstrators. These fears, even more than economic worries, Scammon and Wattenberg thought, would determine how Americans voted in the future."⁵¹ As conservative democrats with ties to Henry Jackson's economic liberalism, social conservatism, and staunch anticommunism, the authors of *The Real Majority*⁵² presented their findings as a warning to the Democratic Party not to veer too far to the left on social issues and foreign policy.

Nixon, Agnew, and their political strategists, such as Patrick Buchanan, appropriated the notion of a real majority concerned with social issues as the way to build a conservative constituency by actively deepening fissures in the Democratic electoral coalition. Looking ahead to the 1972 presidential election, Nixon planned a strategy of tension to divide Democrat against Democrat by linking the Democratic leadership to radicalism. White House aide Patrick Buchanan, who had helped write some of Agnew's wilder attacks on liberals, argued that "'our great hope for 1972 lies in maintaining or exacerbating the deep Democratic rift between the elite, chic, New Left, intellectual, avant-garde, isolationist, bell-bottomed, environmentalist, new-priorities types on the one hand—and the hard hat, Dick Daley, Holy Name Society, ethnic, blue collar, Knights of Columbus, NYPD, Queens Democrats on the other. The Liberal Democrats should be pinioned to their hippie supporters.'"⁵³

The self-conscious strategies of conservative and right wing populist politicians to play upon splits in the Democratic Party were based on the accurate perception that there were deep fissures in its coalition. To understand how fracture lines within the liberal coalition developed, it is useful to distinguish between two phases in post-

50. J. LESTER, *SEARCH FOR THE NEW LAND* 180 (1969).

51. J. SCHELL, *THE TIME OF ILLUSION* 122-23 (1975).

52. R. SCAMMON & B. WATTENBERG, *supra* note 4, at 284-89.

53. J. LUKAS, *NIGHTMARE* 150 (1976).

war liberal capitalism. From the late 1940's through the mid-1950's, the social accord described above was established and affirmed. In the early 1950's, professionals and state administrators joined liberal politicians and liberal capitalists in forging the political and cultural consensus formed around the so-called traditional family and stability, or snaillike reform in race relations. Yet within a few years, capitalist dynamics, institutionalized liberal politics, and rising social movements joined in breaking up the racial, gender, and generational structures which had helped define the American Dream. In this context divisions arose between those who remained committed to the original vision, and those who sought to modify it even as they supported changes that challenged those domestic and racial arrangements. Hence, from the mid-1950's until the late 1960's, the tone, policy orientations, and social bases of liberalism began to shift. Although elite liberals never abandoned their commitment to the Cold War framework for foreign policy, they did respond to a new set of political concerns promoted by newly active political groups that cumulatively threatened the electoral coalition that had sustained the postwar growth coalition.

The liberal role in constructing the postwar social structure of accumulation—especially the political economies of the arms race and suburbanization—came to undercut support for elite, pluralist liberalism in two ways. On the one hand, it built the power of some conservative groups other than conservative white Southerners who were already part of the Democratic Party. These were groups that could abide the politics of the bipartisan growth coalition but were unsympathetic to extensions of liberalism. On the other hand, the political, economic, and sociocultural dynamics of the social accord also, if equally unintentionally, mobilized social groups that sought to extend liberalism. In utilizing images of suburban pastoralism, right wing populist rhetoric and backlash social movements played on tensions in the social accord and reveal how that accord came apart in the “personal” lives of people, not just at the macro-level. Indeed, even as it was being created, suburban family life was being eroded from within. I will first suggest a few ways in which liberal participation in the social accord built conservative forces and impulses, and then I will discuss how the extensions of liberalism created fissures within the liberal coalition.

B. *Liberalism Constructs Conservatism*

Liberalism contributed to the material bases of illiberal ideology in various ways. With growth-defined imperatives presented as in the

general interest, conservative ideology was actually strengthened through policies implemented by liberals, making it harder later for liberals to pursue political reforms without incurring reactions from groups that were not direct beneficiaries of the reforms. The social patterns and cultural norms of suburban living deepened the split between the public and private spheres, valorized private pursuits of individual and family welfare, pleasure and meaning, and thus helped to create the material and ideological support for hostility to expansions of welfare provisions. In the context of the Cold War, privately realized prosperity reinvigorated the ideology of free enterprise even though much of the growth was fueled by government activism.⁵⁴ The successes of capitalist growth meant that in many areas, with highway construction as an example, the distinction between the accumulation and legitimation functions were blurred.⁵⁵ Roads, it was easy enough to believe, were built to facilitate the good life through suburban living.

In addition to strengthening conservative ideology, the politics of growth also helped build the size and power of conservative constituencies. Thus, when bipartisan collaboration fragmented, the right was strengthened. Aerospace and defense were not the only areas in which government spending, sponsored by liberals, contributed to the growth of socioeconomic groups that were neither liberal, nor in the Democratic Party.⁵⁶ Conservative political identities were promoted by growth patterns configured around suburbanization; hence when bipartisan collaboration fragmented, the right was strengthened. Suburbanization moved many working and middle strata people out of urban centers controlled by Democratic Party machines, and housing and highway construction strengthened the generally conservative real estate and construction industries, as well as the conservative building trades unions.

The labor-capital accord helped to disempower workers relative to capitalists, and that economic quiescence led some to the right politically. By the late 1960's and early 1970's, the standard of living no longer rose for most people; union membership had fallen dramati-

54. Walter Dean Burnham properly notes that a commitment to economic individualism has long been an element of United States political culture. W. BURNHAM, *Into the 1980s with Ronald Reagan*, in *THE CURRENT CRISIS IN AMERICAN POLITICS* 268-320 (1982). Still, it is significant that state actions reproduced the social conditions that sustained a broad ideological commitment to free enterprise.

55. See J. O'CONNOR, *THE FISCAL CRISIS OF THE STATE* 64-96 (1973) (distinguishing between state actions which facilitate capital accumulation and those that legitimate liberal democracy).

56. See M. MILES, *THE ODYSSEY OF THE AMERICAN RIGHT* 258-66 (1980).

cally; and strikes increased, centered around wages and control of work relations issues. Many workers were thus implicitly attacking the bases of the capital-labor accord. Numerous books, articles, and studies in the early 1970's attested to the "blue-collar blues."⁵⁷ Yet few liberals addressed themselves to the class-defined problems experienced by many workers. In fact, in these years, some leading liberal intellectuals, now becoming neoconservatives, deflected attention from class by stressing ethnicity, community, and discrimination that whites presumably faced from continued advances in civil rights.⁵⁸ Obviously, working class members of Middle America could not enter into class alliances with powerful allies to oppose these developments. In this context the Middle American script helped define their sense of disempowerment, dislocation, and loss of control as caused by blacks, women, youth, and liberals.

Similarly, the war in Vietnam was not broadly popular. While students and liberal professionals were most actively opposed to the war, working and lower class people were proportionately more opposed. But liberal discourse as well as radical activism embody cultural styles often off-putting for working class people, especially as caricatured by political figures such as Governor Wallace, President Nixon and Vice President Agnew. For many, domestic opposition to a war they themselves did not support became a focus of greater anger than the war itself.⁵⁹

In addition, liberal professionals, state functionaries, and legal reformers—who were increasingly significant political actors and had an enlarged liberal constituency—were important in constructing the postwar social order and later alienating Middle Americans. While liberal professionals simultaneously maintain and transform cultural and social relations, conservatives and traditionalists are less alert to the ways they stabilize social relations than how they seem to undermine them. Thus, a crucial element in the Middle American text has been that liberal elites promote abstract notions of racial justice, intrude into home life, impose their values, and align themselves with culturally permissive elements in society to the detriment of moral,

57. For sources expressing the breadth of interest in working class discontentment with work, see H. BRAVERMAN, *LABOR AND MONOPOLY CAPITAL* (1974); S. TERKEL, *WORKING* (1972); *WORK IN AMERICA, REPORT OF A SPECIAL TASK FORCE TO THE SECRETARY OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE* (1973).

58. On the conservative impulse behind presenting class phenomena as ethnicity, see Hacker, *Cutting Classes*, 23 N.Y. REV. BOOKS 15-28 (1976). For a more general critique of ethnic revival as a response to the rationalization of the modern world, see O. PATTERSON, *ETHNIC CHAUVINISM* (1977).

59. See G. HODGSON, *supra* note 1, at 384-98.

traditional families. There is a partial truth to this charge, but it is exaggerated, because it suppresses consideration of two other factors. First, this perspective, which presents state bureaucrats and liberal professionals, often called the New Class, as *the* elite, misses the extent to which capitalist dynamics as well as many capitalists themselves supported many of the political and cultural changes blamed on the New Class. Yet the participation of liberals in legitimating the capitalist social accord helped deflect attention from capitalist economic and social institutions to state-centered political institutions. Second, state-centered, elitist methods of implementing social change often result when more local, voluntary methods of seeking change have been unsuccessful.

Thus, progressive action around many issues tended to be foreclosed or unattractive to those people who became attracted to the Middle American sensibility. At the same time, even within the celebratory consensus, there were contradictory values, impulses, and goals, and along with racial conflict, they tore the suburban dream apart. Those who remained committed to the traditionalist version of the dream came to feel politically and culturally marginalized and demeaned.

V. CULTURAL CONFLICT

Segregated suburban pastoralism within a growth economy promoted a conservative cultural milieu, but there were other developments that promoted political and cultural change long before the economic and institutional framework of the accord came undone. Even within the celebratory consensus itself, there were contradictory values, impulses, and goals; these, as well as racial conflict, and later struggles over United States foreign policy, were to tear apart the political culture and electoral coalition that had promised to sustain the American way of life indefinitely. Indeed, there were limits to the extent to which even those most committed to the American Dream bought the whole package. No sooner had the suburban family with its radical separation between home and work as distinct spheres, one for women and the other for men, established itself as the hegemonic cultural norm, than it began to break apart in ways that challenged traditional gender roles and morality, conservative religious beliefs, and the power of parents over children, and of husbands over wives. As liberals politically and culturally participated in blurring these very spheres that they had helped construct, the Middle American text sought to revalorize them.

A. *The Male Retreat from Work*

The emphasis on consumerism in a world of deskilled, bureaucratized labor simultaneously created and attacked the male stake in the role of husband, father, and breadwinner. "Told" by management and labor unions not to seek changes in their lives at the point of production, many men began to question the manner in which the breadwinner role relegated them to the sphere of hard work and production while their families could relish the fruits of their labor in the domestic sphere.⁶⁰ Many men came to seek satisfaction in their private lives, not through their work, but in various forms of "expressive individualism" that broke with the "utilitarian individualism" called for by salaried and waged labor.⁶¹ As feminist writer Barbara Ehrenreich and the authors of the Middle American text agreed, the cultural standards, often legitimated by liberal professionals, which some men used to question their work and family lives, involved forms of class condescension encoded in the critique of masculinity.⁶² Thus, an option chosen by some men was perceived by other men as an attack on their class-influenced gendered identities as well as their morality.

B. *Youth Culture*

Their wives and children also became restive. Until the early 1970's, worry about white, middle class youth was more culturally and politically salient than opposition to feminism.⁶³ In the 1950's, youth were alternatively viewed as a social problem when they threatened to disrupt the collective commitment to domesticity, and were emulated as they set the very standards of consumption and leisure that undermined those domestic relations. Many people, correctly sensing that they were losing control over the pace and direction of social change, understandably feared that their children would not grow up to be like themselves, and at the same time, sought

60. See B. EHRENREICH, *THE HEARTS OF MEN* 29-41 (1983).

61. For a discussion of this distinction, see R. BELLAH, R. MADSEN, W. SULLIVAN, A. SWIDLER & S. TIPTON, *HABITS OF THE HEART* (1985).

62. B. EHRENREICH, *supra* note 60, at 132-36.

63. In 1968 and 1972, President Nixon, Vice President Agnew, and Governor George Wallace attacked youth, the youth culture, and the student movement, not women and feminism. For an overview of youth in the postwar period, see L. JONES, *GREAT EXPECTATIONS* (1980). For an introduction to the panic over youth in the 1950's, see J. GILBERT, *A CYCLE OF OUTRAGE* (1986). For conflicting interpretations of the culture of the 1960's, in which youth is an important category, see R. BERMAN, *AMERICA IN THE SIXTIES* (1968) (conservative, critical treatment); M. DICKSTEIN, *GATES OF EDEN* (1977) (liberal, sympathetic treatment). For the right wing populist hostility toward youth, see G. HODGSON, *supra* note 1.

to escape from the confines of their own lives through their children. American culture has long been ambivalent about youth, at once favoring youth over age, *and* fearing that the young will depart from clear values and established social patterns. In a society such as ours, so defined by change, most people want their children to better themselves, but will not acknowledge the extent to which that involves moving into a different world: one that encourages people to reject the world they have come from. In a poignant interview in *Working*, Mike Lefevre recognized this. He had been criticizing college kids who condescend to working class people when Studs Terkel asked him, "Yet you want your kid to be an effete snob?" Lefevre answered, "Yes, I want my kid to look at me and say, 'Dad, you're a nice guy, but you're a fuckin' dummy.' Hell yes, I want my kid to tell me that he's not gonna be like me."⁶⁴ All but absent from most socially traditionalist accounts of loss of control over youth is the transformative effect capitalism has on relations between the generations; recent capitalist dynamics in the United States have changed the division of labor, and promoted higher education and age-specific consumption patterns, all of which reconfigure relations between parents and children in the family. Not attending to the economic dimensions of sociocultural change, many Middle Americans responded to a rhetoric that directed their attention to other, also important, sources of cultural change.

Young people came to embody unanticipated, uncontrollable cultural changes. They were presented both as threatened by changes and as threatening invaders from the future. Isolated from the work culture of their fathers and socialized through consumption, many young people did not seem to absorb the work ethic, and parents who worked so that their children would have a better life feared that their children were too soft or unwholesome. In the Middle American text, these understandable concerns are hung onto clusters of binary oppositions that cumulatively define "us" as losing control of our culture and children to "them." "We" are small town, hard working, decent, virtuous, and homogeneous; "they" are cosmopolitan, lazy, immoral, permissive, and heterogeneous. "They"—gays, blacks, feminists, secular educators—become pied pipers seducing "our" children.

Economic, political, and demographic trends increased the number of students completing high school and going to college, which provided an extended, institutionalized context for peer groups, youth culture, and oppositional political movements to flourish. Responding and adapting to consumerism, young people themselves

64. S. TERKEL, *supra* note 57, at xxxvii.

took cultural postwar trends to the extremes *and* rejected them; they embraced consumerism and through it created styles of dress and taste in music hostile to their parents' standards. They used their discretionary income to create—even within the confines of their own homes—sites of opposition.⁶⁵ "Barbarian culture" did not have to assault any barricades; it slipped in over the airwaves.⁶⁶ Many adults, other than conservatives, also viewed rock and roll as a threat to youth as it insinuated itself into suburbia and insular urban ethnic communities. The very commodities—hi-fi's and televisions—not only signaled economic success, but also were instruments by which young white people could listen to black music.

In addition to the cultural "deviances" of youth, they were also viewed as politically suspect. In the 1960's, many white as well as black students took the ideals of liberalism seriously enough that they struggled to realize them in the civil rights and student movements, thereby coming to reject established political processes. Politically and culturally they took individualism to extremes in beat, hip, and other subcultures, and they also sought egalitarian, communitarian alternatives to economic individualism. The student movement widened and deepened into a broadly oppositional youth culture as it began to include antiwar activism, drugs, rock music, freer sexuality, and an emphasis on pleasure, not productivity. At first, many liberals saw the student movement as idealistic and agreed with it on issues such as civil rights and curricular reform, even when ambivalent about its anti-authoritarian streak. Conservatives opposed it from the onset, and by the late 1960's, conservatives authored submissions to the Middle American text that presented "our" young people as threatened by blacks, libertines, feminists, liberal professionals, homosexuals, radicals, and "them" as a threat to Americanism, hard work, and family life.

C. *The Fall of the Feminine Mystique*

Having been driven from wage labor after World War II, since the early 1950's, married women, as well as single and divorced women and mothers, have been turning to work outside the home in

65. See generally S. FRITH, *SOUND EFFECTS* (1981).

66. In one of the first books about the beats, the author prefaces by writing:

When the barbarians appear on the frontiers of a civilization it is a sign of a crisis in that civilization. If the barbarians come, not with weapons of war but with the songs and ikons of peace, it is a sign that the crisis is one of a spiritual nature. In either case the crisis is never welcomed by the entrenched beneficiaries of the status quo.

Preface to L. LIPTON, *THE HOLY BARBARIANS* (1959).

increasing numbers, both to improve and to escape their domestic lives. The breadwinner *ethic* was not enough to sustain the standard of living many families aspired to, and many wives sought to supplement their husband's income. Women were also actively drawn into the labor force because of the expanding number of sales, clerical, and teaching jobs. In addition, many women sought paid work as they found home life limiting, felt they were wasting their educations, and generally began to question the postwar feminine mystique that had urged domesticity on them.⁶⁷ Across the 1960's and 1970's, numerous changes in the position and lives of women eroded the normative status of the traditional family with its full-time wife and mother. These changes included greater legitimacy of careers for women, rapid expansion in the number of female-headed households, loosening of sex roles, rising divorce rate, increased attention to sexual pleasure for women, the liberalization of attitudes about abortion, and decreased sanctions against lesbianism. Feminism embodied and heightened these various changes in ways consonant with increasing independence and equality for women. By the early 1970's, feminism saw itself and was seen as a threat to traditional views about gender relations, sexuality, and family life.⁶⁸

Almost from its origins, the second wave of feminism has been criticized, even at times by adherents, for promoting narrow class interests while claiming to speak about the general interests of women. This charge works to reconfigure the issue from one of sexism and sexual hierarchies, to one of cultural preferences imposed by elites.⁶⁹ Again, this rhetorical shift works because it is not only false, but also contains partial truths. There are two reasons why those who broke with traditional social roles were condemned in class as well as gender terms.

First, there are material differences in the lives of women that often divide feminists from antifeminists. As various studies of feminist and antifeminist activists show, there are clear differences in the kinds of women who involve themselves in feminist and antifeminist activities. Feminists are more likely to work, have fewer children, take religion less seriously, earn more money themselves, and hence, if married, are relatively more independent of their husbands than antifeminists who work outside the home less, have more children,

67. For the classic feminist criticism of the postwar ethos of domesticity, see B. FRIEDAN, *THE FEMININE MYSTIQUE* (1963).

68. For influential early attacks on feminism, see M. DECTER, *THE NEW CHASTITY* (1972); G. GILDER, *SEXUAL SUICIDE* (1973).

69. For a typical example of this form of argument, see Skerry, *The Class Conflict over Abortion*, *PUB. INTEREST*, Summer 1978, at 69.

and are pronouncedly more religious. Although family income difference is not a significant differentiating variable, social class is significant. More antifeminists are in older social classes that are declining in political and cultural influence; in contrast, more feminists are members of rising social classes, and the diffuse New Class is increasing its political and cultural power. In recent years, the emergent social classes, liberal cultural values, life-styles, etc., have, as traditionalists charge, been more accepted and even promoted in the mass media; their values have found their way into educational settings and have been supported by liberal professionals.⁷⁰ What can seem like minor reform, or mere crumbs to those demanding change, can seem like a revolution, or a whole banquet, to those opposing the change.

Similarly, although the pace of legal change may have been, and remains, frustrating to many feminists, from the point of view of traditionalists it seemed as though the federal government, the courts, Congress, and elite liberal opinionmakers were promoting women's rights. Feminist movements promoted legal reform, often in actual or tacit alliances with elite, largely male professions, such as law and medicine in the case of abortion. The antifeminist movements were even more explicitly formed as a backlash against legal reform and its cultural implications. The Equal Rights Amendment and liberalization of abortion law reform symbolized both increased individual rights and autonomy to women.

VI. THE SOCIAL MOVEMENTS OF MIDDLE AMERICA CONTRASTED

In explaining the rise of the backlash movements, it is important to complement attention to the role of liberalism and tensions within liberalism in constructing the field of concerns that were salient to those movements with attention to how particular issues provoked into action various groups with different kinds of resources. The differences in how issues were constituted, and differences in the kinds of resources backlash movements could use, help to explain the varying strengths of the social movements that embody elements of the Middle American sensibility. In other words, there is no unitary political cultural logic that explains the concrete, varied manifestations of so complex and internally variegated social development as the emergence of Middle America.⁷¹

70. A number of studies attest to these differences. *See, e.g.,* K. LUKER, *ABORTION AND THE POLITICS OF MOTHERHOOD* (1984); J. MANSBRIDGE, *WHY WE LOST THE ERA* (1986).

71. For an introduction to the literature on resource mobilization theory, see Jenkins,

A. *Antifeminism*

Hostility toward youthful permissiveness and anti-Americanism and defenses of "our" children and young people as enunciated by populist politicians was not matched by national organizing efforts, but anti-feminism did develop in dense organizational networks. Whereas Middle American concern for youth and children involved local political activism, especially in school politics, anti-abortion and anti-ERA movements lent Middle America national organizational capacity. The anti-abortion movement was firmly entrenched in 1973 before the Supreme Court's decision in *Roe v. Wade*.⁷² In its early phases, the Catholic Church provided a national network; church institutions were an organizational resource through which anti-abortion activities could be organized. *Roe v. Wade* gave it a clear national symbol as well; national relevance combined with a nationally organized countermovement allowed anti-abortionists to maintain a national profile. The ERA was also a nationally prominent issue, although after the first flurry of legislative support for it, the timing of crucial events was determined at the state level. The antifeminists had both a national network, largely organized by Phyllis Schlafly through her Stop ERA/Eagle Forum, and state level organizational strength.⁷³

B. *Racial Backlash*

In contrast, antiblack organizational capacity, although strong throughout the South in the period of Massive Resistance in the middle and late 1950's, was local, urban-oriented in the late 1960's and 1970's. The broad political anger at blacks was a central part of the Middle American text and centered on such issues as crime, law and order, and expansions of the welfare state; but the organizational density of nonparty-based antiblack organizing was more local in focus. Both aspects of the racial backlash become clear when looked at in the context of the federal political system. From the mid-1950's, economic forces, modest elite political actions, and especially black civil rights movements, were woven into a challenge to those features of the established social structure of accumulation that sustained de jure segregation. Nonetheless, in the context of my argument that Middle America was not only discovered, but invented, elite political and economic groups, along with conservative politicians, contributed to

Resource Mobilization Theory and the Study of Social Movements, 9 ANN. REV. SOC. 527 (1983).

72. 410 U.S. 113 (1973).

73. J. MANSBRIDGE, *supra* note 70, at 174-77.

Middle American hostility to civil rights. They, along with conservative rhetoricians, are culpable because they rhetorically promoted racial change beyond the point to which they were actually willing to materially or ideologically commit themselves. By maintaining basically racist social and economic structures—and barely addressing the class dimensions of racial oppression—much of the material and symbolic cost of the slight diminution of racism was borne by working class and middle strata whites, not the rich. When living standards were leveling off and taxes were increasing, white people who did not question the nation-state or class structures could see poor blacks as joined with liberal elites in an attack on society's producers. This emphasis on a productive/unproductive split is a recurrent image that conservatives recently have used to promote racial, not class divisions.

Race has been one of the central political categories of postwar politics. The mechanization of southern agriculture and the consequent urbanization of blacks not only contributed to white suburbanization, as noted above, and clearer racial demarcation of racial stratification within the working class, but also contributed to the rise of the civil rights movement and political disruption of the Democratic Party.⁷⁴ The role of the civil rights movement has been detailed numerous times.⁷⁵ Four points are important here.

First, the civil rights movement challenged the structure of race relations in the South, creating proto-Middle Americans by provoking white southerners to break from a coalition in which blacks were no longer kept as subordinate as they had been. In the 1950's and early 1960's, the southern, white leadership was quite explicitly segregationist in its defense of the white, southern "way of life." As racial issues became more national in scope, segregationist rhetoric was less evident publically and racial politics came to be encoded in law and order campaigns, hostility to liberal elites, welfare, and in a defense of the family. Still, people got the idea. As conservative populist Robert Whitaker noted, George Wallace said very similar things in Alabama in 1962 and nationally in 1968. Whitaker acknowledged, "[l]iberal suspicions that Wallacite slogans were code words for racist feelings may well have had some merit, therefore."⁷⁶

Second, the passage of the Great Society programs, the first

74. F. PIVEN & R. CLOWARD, *REGULATING THE POOR* 181-340 (1971).

75. Useful overviews of the civil rights movement include: F. PIVEN & R. CLOWARD, *POOR PEOPLE'S MOVEMENTS* 181-263 (1979); H. SITKOFF, *THE STRUGGLE FOR BLACK EQUALITY, 1954-1980* (1981).

76. R. WHITAKER, *A PLAGUE ON BOTH YOUR HOUSES* 32 (1976).

major expansion of the welfare state since the New Deal, was largely presented as, and viewed as, a response to black activism. Many white people felt that blacks were getting something for nothing, and they thought that they were getting it at the expense of ordinary white people, not elites. Hence, again the animus at blacks was joined with hostility to liberal politicians, liberal professionals, and state bureaucrats who supported and benefited from the Great Society reforms. Together they were viewed as a new interest group competing for resources with existing interest groups. Partly describing this hostility and partly trying to create it, Kevin Phillips wrote in 1969 that:

The principal force which broke up the Democratic (New Deal) coalition is the Negro socioeconomic revolution and liberal Democratic ideological inability to cope with it. . . . The Democratic Party fell victim to the ideological impetus of a liberalism which had carried it beyond programs taxing the few for the benefit of the many (the New Deal) to programs taxing the many on behalf of the few (the Great Society).⁷⁷

This is the most pervasive element in the racial backlash, one that characterizes more than just Middle Americans. Linked to economic individualism, antistatism, and privatism, it fuels economic conservatism as much, or more than, social traditionalism.

Third, the politics of race brought two groups into conflict at the urban level. Established cross-class alliances of whites, articulated into the older urban Democratic Party machines, came into conflict with emerging cross-class coalitions of the business elite, liberal reformers, and blacks. The urban business elites were more tied into the national power structure than urban politicians, the liberal reformers had more ties to the federal level, especially after the Great Society legislation, and the blacks were motivated by a national social movement. Thus, urban political machines mobilized in opposition to a rising class alliance challenging local systems of political control and patronage.⁷⁸ Although these developments took place at the local level, some of the particular conflicts, especially in New York, had national audiences. The 1968 conflict between black parents supported by the Ford Foundation and the white teachers' union (American Federation of Teachers) in the conflict over local control in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, and the attempt to establish a civil review board to look into police violence, especially against blacks, brought these

77. K. PHILLIPS, *THE EMERGING REPUBLICAN MAJORITY* 37 (1970).

78. For a clear discussion of shifting class alliances in New York urban politics, see M. SHEFTER, *POLITICAL CRISIS/FISCAL CRISIS* (1985).

coalitions into confrontation in newsworthy fashion. But unless similar constellations of political forces existed locally, the same scenarios could not be repeated elsewhere.

Fourth, the politics of school desegregation became a national issue, but in a way in which people in different locales were affected at different times.⁷⁹ Shifting from a southern issue in which many northern whites could sympathize with southern blacks fighting de jure segregation, many northern whites felt different when school segregation seemed to be a de facto consequence of housing segregation. There had been years in which white backlash politicians, such as Louise Day Hicks, who was from a Democratic Party family in Boston, sought support by threatening that busing was coming. Of course, neither she nor other antibusing politicians sought to avoid it through locally initiated reforms responsive to the demands of black students and parents for improvement in the quality of education.⁸⁰ Indeed, local school districts, almost without exception, did nothing to prevent busing by actually improving the quality of education in black schools or voluntarily desegregating. In defeating local black activists—who were often more concerned with improving the quality of education than with integrating schools—their local opponents helped create the context in which both black and white liberal lawyers, often, although not in the Boston case, associated with the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, sought relief from racially-based inequities in education through school integration.⁸¹ When busing plans were implemented in the 1970's, they combined adherence to Supreme Court or other federal court decisions with administrative implementation at the local level. Thus, to antibusing activists, busing seemed to be imposed from above and by outsiders and could combine such slogans as "Kill Niggers" and "Stop Judicial Tyranny,"⁸² even though their intransigence to local remedies was a cause of implementation from above. As intensely motivated and densely organized as they were locally, antibusing movements, unlike the anti-abortion movement, lacked the organizational capacity and

79. M. WEINBERG, A CHANCE TO LEARN 81-139 (1977).

80. P. SCHRAG, VILLAGE SCHOOL DOWNTOWN 6-23 (1967) (contains a description of Louise Day Hicks' political evolution); see also Green & Hunter, *Racism and Busing in Boston*, 8 RADICAL AMERICA 1 (1974), reprinted in Green & Hunter, *Racism and Busing in Boston*, in MARXISM AND THE METROPOLIS 271-96 (W. Tabb & L. Sawers, eds. 1978) (discussing the history and present status of Boston's busing problem).

81. On the shift from a concern about improved quality of education to integration, see Bell, *Serving Two Masters: Integration Ideals and Client Interests in School Desegregation Litigation*, 85 YALE L.J. 470 (1976).

82. I saw these two slogans spray-painted next to one another on a wall in the Charlestown section of Boston in September of 1975, at the beginning of the second year of busing.

the political focus for sustaining a national infrastructure. The Catholic Church provided the anti-abortion movement, and Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum provided the anti-ERA movement, with national networks, unlike the antibusing movements which were generally restricted to cities or even neighborhoods. In addition, busing was implemented at different times in different cities, so by the time antibusing activists in one city were energized, the activism in another city had already peaked.⁸³

The different kinds of organizational capacities are important because they point to the social relations as well as political rhetoric upon which the Middle American political identity was based. That different kinds of organizational resources were important for different issues, helps explain a confusing aspect of recent politics. Antiracial issues have broader support than antifeminist issues at the electoral and rhetorical levels because of the different ways they articulate with legal reform and state policy. Racial rhetoric links with anti-welfare state sentiments, and fits with the push for economic individualism; thus many voters who say they are not prejudiced, and may not be by some accounts, oppose welfare state spending as unjust. Antifeminist rhetoric, because of the current array of feminist issues that stress individual rights more than welfare provisions, is articulated around defense of the family, traditional morality, and religious fundamentalism. Ironically, even though antifeminist rhetoric can be presented in ways that are not illegitimate, it is attractive to a smaller sector of Middle America. Thus, there is an imbalance that makes more difficult the consolidation of a firm Middle American political identity: its nationally organized segments have less ideological capacity for reaching out to other constituencies than have the locally organized segments.

VII. CONCLUSION

Both the sex/gender and race issues are, however, at the center of the Middle American text. Kevin Phillips has suggested that the American Century broke up along four fracture lines: economics, nationalism, institutional, and social and cultural meaning.⁸⁴ Although these are awkward categories, as illustrated by the fact that racial issues and even the arms race cut across all four axes and are

83. There actually is a small coordinating organization for antibusing groups, the National Association for Neighborhood Schools (NANS), but it lacks the clout that the antifeminist groups have had at the national level. For an overview of its activities, see Swayne, *Anti-Busing and the New Right: A Rhetorical Criticism of the National Association for Neighborhood Schools* (1981) (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Ohio State University).

84. K. PHILLIPS, *supra* note 6, at 18-30.

not just social and cultural as he says, they are still heuristically useful. They help us understand why the privileging of "social and cultural meaning" was important in constituting Middle America. Different fracture lines define quite different political coalitions, and the centrality of social traditionalism for Middle America suppressed other concerns or provided the frame in which those concerns were politically articulated. The discussion above helps explain why social and cultural issues predominated over other concerns in the creation of the Middle American text. To recapitulate briefly, traditionalist responses to loss of control over social and cultural developments were central to the creation of a Middle America, because its members did not have powerful allies to address institutional and economic inequities, but they did find themselves courted by people who appealed to them with conservative populist rhetoric. Many Middle Americans were mobilized around traditionalist social and cultural concerns because they could turn on people with less power than themselves, but in attacking domination by liberal, statist elites, they could also present themselves as the wronged, excluded, silent majority. In this way they could feel that they were the true "people" threatened by forces above and below them; they could draw upon the conservative strands in American culture—hostility to racial and sexual equality, economic individualism, patriotism, and moral righteousness—to attack liberal elites and subordinate groups demanding rights.

Attending to how existing constraints and conservative appeals helped forge the Middle American identity reminds us that identities do not naturally unfold, nor are they cultural essences that are released in particular historical moments. By the late 1960's, many Americans distrusted basic American institutions, and hostility to government and business rose together.⁸⁵ Yet at the level of activism, Middle Americans had allies for antistate issues not available to them in opposing business. Middle Americans, intent on protesting economic issues, for instance, could not enter into class alliances with powerful allies to oppose these developments. "It is more difficult to organize protests against the rich than against the poor, because the rich are likely to control most channels of social action."⁸⁶ By contrast, they were courted to join conservative coalitions that turned on blacks, women, and youth.

Thus, the broad economic, institutional, national, and social and

85. S. LIPSET & W. SCHNEIDER, *supra* note 10, at 291-333.

86. Litwak, Hooyman & Warren, *Ideological Complexity and Middle-American Rationality*, 37 PUB. OPINION Q. 317, 327 (1973).

cultural crisis in society was consolidated into a Middle American text that stressed the social and cultural, subordinating the others within a cultural reading of the situation. Within that text, all the other issues could be addressed; economics was addressed in terms of taxes that focused on welfare for blacks, not class relations. Even business was attacked at times for being internationalist, the media as too supportive of cultural radicalism, and pornographers and abortion clinic owners as overly craven in pursuit of profits; but the direction of the criticism and the animus motivating it deflected attention away from social class. Because of the lack of "fit" between the populist text invoked by conservative politicians and the organized expressions of the Middle American sensibility, however, the Middle American political identity has not been socially and institutionally consolidated.

It now becomes evident, I think, that the conservative rhetoricians who drafted the Middle American text had important co-authors in addition to the Middle Americans themselves. These were the dominant economic and political elites who had disproportionate influence in constructing the postwar social structure of accumulation. Liberal elites bear a twofold responsibility. First, they participated in a bipartisan political economy of growth predicated on subordinating labor to capital, reproducing in new settings racial segregation, and socially reconstituting and culturally valorizing the so-called traditional family as the proper paradigm for gender and generation relations. These were domestically consolidated and celebrated in suburban pastoralism. Liberal macro-political economy was thus interwoven with illiberal racial and sexual relations. The state in the social accord acted not only as a liberal capitalist state, but also as a conservative racial and gender state.

Second, the consensual combination of economic dynamism and social stability was short lived, as blacks, youth, and women utilized economic changes and liberal political principles to transform their subordinated social positions. In a complex relationship with liberal professionals and bureaucrats, these groups put pressure on liberal economic and political elites, who supported some extensions of civil rights, civil liberties, and expansions of the welfare state. In part, they responded to these demands of social movements and new interest groups, because they fit with their own strategies for modifying the political economy, and in part because, in the context of an expanding economy and the privatization of cultural meaning, concessions to these demands seemed less disruptive than resistance to them. In this second stage, they partly displaced the costs of those changes onto

interest groups that, just the day before, they had valorized as at the center of the American dream. Liberal elites split between those who remained committed to economic growth as the route to solve social inequities, and those who sought to use the state to foster extensions of rights and modest redistributions of resources. They later became identified as the New Class, while the former were those who represented those groups interested in economic growth but stable class, race, and gender relations. With the fragmentation of liberalism, social conservatives could appeal to the sectors of the liberal coalition that remained wedded to the dream of suburban pastoralism. Conservative rhetoric may have actually created a conservative political text out of the diffuse Middle American sensibility; but liberal political rule also contributed to creating Middle America, not merely by setting the context in which conservatives made those appeals, but also by helping to create the interest groups and cultural values that conservatives could charge liberals with betraying. Thus, a materialist account of the formation of political identity is a necessary complement to one that stresses the power of discourse.