

The Geography of the Class Culture Wars

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As suggested by the title of her new book, *Reshaping the Work-Family Debate: Why Men and Class Matter*, Joan Williams takes class seriously. Class matters, Williams argues, because “socially conscious progressives”¹ need political allies to achieve progress with their agenda for work-family reform.² Williams calls us not only to think about class and recognize it as a significant axis of stratification and (dis)advantage, but also to treat the working class with respect and dignity. Emblematic of Williams’s argument is her challenge to us to “[d]iscard[] Marxian analyses from 30,000 feet” and “come down to learn enough about working-class life to end decades of casual insults.”³ In other words, be nice

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1. JOAN C. WILLIAMS, *RESHAPING THE WORK-FAMILY DEBATE: WHY MEN AND CLASS MATTER* 152 (2010). She also refers to this group as the “reform-minded elite.” *Id.* at 160, 211. Most socially conscious progressives are within the class that Williams labels “professional-managerial.” *Id.* at 156, 163; *see also infra* notes 15–19.

2. *See, e.g., id.* at 211 (“A precondition for permanent political change is a changed relationship between the white working-class and the reform-minded elite.”).

3. *Id.* at 212.

and play fair. It's a tried-and-true way to win friends and influence people.

In this Essay, I seek to enhance Williams's powerful and pathbreaking discussion of the white working class in three ways. Part I brings geography explicitly into consideration by arguing that the culture wars—which I believe Williams aligns correctly along a broad and fuzzy line between the working class and the professional-managerial class—similarly align along the rural–urban axis. Just as liberal elites shun and ridicule the white working class,⁴ they similarly express disdain for rural and small-town residents.⁵ Indeed, among denizens of the largest cities and “coastal elites,” rural Americans have become a proxy for the working class—the uncouth, the uncultured, and—yes—the illiberal.⁶ I con-

4. See *id.* at 154; see also JOE BAGEANT, *DEER HUNTING WITH JESUS: DISPATCHES FROM AMERICA'S CLASS WAR* 103 (2007); JENNIFER SHERMAN, *THOSE WHO WORK, THOSE WHO DON'T: POVERTY, MORALITY, AND FAMILY IN RURAL AMERICA* 181 (2009).

5. See *infra* Part I. I use the terms “rural,” “small-town,” and “nonmetropolitan” interchangeably in this Essay, although I am more precisely referring to places that might be seen as culturally rural or that the U.S. government labels “nonmetropolitan,” which is a county-level designation for counties with fewer than 100,000 residents and no urban cluster larger than 50,000. *Metropolitan and Micropolitan Statistical Areas*, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU (last updated Aug. 19, 2008), <http://www.census.gov/population/www/metroareas/metroarea.html>. The Census Bureau has, since 1910, defined “rural” as open countryside and places with fewer than 2,500 residents. John Cromartie & Shawn Bucholtz, *Defining the “Rural” in Rural America*, *AMBER WAVES*, 28, 31 (June 2008), available at <http://www.ers.usda.gov/AmberWaves/June08/PDF/RuralAmerica.pdf> (describing the variety of ways in which the federal government defines “rural”). According to the 2000 census, 25.7 million “rural” residents, about half of all rural residents, live in “metropolitan” areas by virtue of being in a metro county. *Geographic Comparison Table, Urban/Rural and Metropolitan/Nonmetropolitan Population: 2000*, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU (2000), <http://factfinder.census.gov> (follow “Get Data” hyperlink under Decennial Census; then follow “Geographic Comparison Tables” hyperlink under “Census 2000 Summary File 1 (SF 1) 100-Percent Data”; then select “United States—Urban/Rural and Inside/Outside Metropolitan Area”); see also Jennifer Bradley & Bruce Katz, *Village Idiocy: Enough with Small-Town Triumphalism*, *NEW REPUBLIC*, Oct. 8, 2008. These “rural” residents are less likely to be culturally rural or to experience the sorts of service deprivations associated with more traditional rural populations in nonmetropolitan counties; see also *Briefing Rooms: Measuring Rurality: What is Rural?*, U.S. DEP'T OF AGRIC. ECON. RESEARCH SERV. (Mar. 22, 2007), <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/Rurality/WhatIsRural> (explaining new definitions of urban/rural and metro/nonmetro); Lisa R. Pruitt, *Gender, Geography & Rural Justice*, 23 *BERKELEY J. GENDER L. & JUST.* 338, 343–48 (2008) (discussing the contested nature of the rural).

Further, when I refer in this Essay to rural, small-town, and nonmetropolitan, I'm specifically excluding nonmetropolitan college towns, where politics tends to be more progressive, as well as rural resorts and other examples of rural gentrification. See Lawrence C. Hamilton et al., *Place Matters: Challenges and Opportunities in Four Rural Americas*, 1 *REP. ON RURAL AM.* 1, 6 (2008), available at http://www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu/publications/Report_PlaceMatters.pdf (articulating a four-part taxonomy of rural places, including one labeled “amenity-rich”); “rural gentrification” label, *LEGAL RURALISM BLOG*, (Feb. 28, 2011, 10:59 AM), <http://legalruralism.blogspot.com/search/label/rural%20gentrification>.

6. Indeed, the relevance of geography to class-bashing is suggested by authors like Thomas Frank, whose book, *What's the Matter with Kansas?*, Williams criticizes as “paint[ing] a picture of workers too dim-witted to recognize they are being manipulated by the capitalist class.” WILLIAMS, *supra* note 1, at 212. The relevance of geography to law and policy-making is suggested by a recent

tend that social progressives reserve their greatest contempt—and increasingly also their ire—for whites in rural America, the vast majority of whom are working class.⁷

Based on this argument that the opposing sides in the class culture wars are now represented, broadly speaking, by the rural and the urban, I take up three other issues. First, in Part II, I disrupt Williams's broad-brush class dichotomy—"professional-managerial" and "working class"—by introducing other classes and subclasses that are particularly relevant in rural contexts. Specifically, I show how Williams's implicitly metropolitan class taxonomy parallels a similar divide in nonmetropolitan communities, and I discuss the role of morality as a basis for differentiation among factions of the white working class in both types of settings. Then, in Part III, I argue that cultural and political disdain for rural folks prevents law and policy-makers from seeing and addressing the distinct challenges facing the rural citizenry—including those associated with work-life security. I conclude in Part IV with thoughts on what might provide common ground between the professional-managerial class and the white working class—ground that could provide a bridge of understanding that would permit political détente and, ultimately, cooperation.

My thoughts about Joan Williams's book and the class culture wars are informed by my own rural upbringing,⁸ as well as my status as a "class migrant," which Williams defines as "individuals born and raised working class, who join the upper-middle class through access to elite education."⁹ In addition, my comments and analysis rely heavily on two sources—one conventional, the other not—that complement Williams's fine work. First, I draw on Jennifer Sherman's 2009 book, *Those Who Work, Those Who Don't: Poverty, Morality, and Family in Rural America*.¹⁰ This book provides a rural-specific counterpart and complement to

book on family law. NAOMI CAHN & JUNE CARBONE, *RED FAMILIES V. BLUE FAMILIES: LEGAL POLARIZATION AND THE CREATION OF CULTURE* (2010) (calling geography a guiding principle of the book); see also BILL BISHOP, *THE BIG SORT: WHY THE CLUSTERING OF LIKE-MINDED AMERICA IS TEARING US APART* (2008) (discussing the relevance of geography to culture and politics and arguing that Americans increasingly move to places so that they can be with others who share their political views and are in other ways similar).

7. Indeed, I am not convinced that liberal elites' disdain extends to the working-class folks in their midst. In my experience, social progressives tend to be relatively compassionate and respectful of workers with whom they have face-to-face, day-to-day contact.

8. See Lisa R. Pruitt, *Rural Rhetoric*, 39 CONN. L. REV. 159, 165 (2006) [hereinafter Pruitt, *Rural Rhetoric*]; Lisa R. Pruitt, *How You Gonna' Keep Her Down on the Farm . . .*, 78 UMKC L. REV. 1085 (2010) [hereinafter Pruitt, *How You Gonna' Keep Her Down on the Farm . . .*].

9. WILLIAMS, *supra* note 1, at 154. A partial account of my class migration was published as Pruitt, *How You Gonna' Keep Her Down on the Farm . . .*, *supra* note 8. For another tale of class migration, see Laura T. Kessler, *Feminism for Everyone*, 34 SEATTLE U. L. REV. 679, 697 (2011).

10. SHERMAN, *supra* note 4.

Williams's more generalized explanation of why morality and family—and therefore cultural issues more broadly—are so important to the white working class.¹¹ The second, rather unorthodox source is journalist Joe Bageant's 2007 book, *Deer Hunting with Jesus: Dispatches from America's Class War*.¹² Bageant's insights as a cultural critic—though articulated in a sharper tone and with a more anecdotal method—are uncannily similar to those that Williams and Sherman document in academic fashion. Finally, I illustrate how President Obama has endorsed the core ideas of all three authors.

I. CULTURE WARS ACROSS THE RURAL–URBAN AXIS

In two marvelous chapters, “The Class Culture Gap” and “Culture Wars as Class Conflict,” Williams provides a primer on class, discussing how it may be identified and measured, and presenting data on education, income levels, and occupation.¹³ More significantly, she synthesizes every major ethnography of the white working class in the late-twentieth-century United States, thereby serving up for the reader a composite portrait of this milieu. In doing so, Williams touches on a wide array of cultural manifestations of class, from how we raise our children, to our leisure pursuits, to what we eat, to our attitudes about religion.¹⁴ Williams's analysis is based on two broad classes, which she labels the “working class” and the “professional-managerial class.” In comparing and contrasting the tastes and folkways of these two classes, Williams makes the point that the professional-managerial class—no less than their working-class counterparts—wear their culture on their proverbial sleeves: “Our understated clothes, educational travel, and our teeny tiny portions of

11. It is worth noting that working-class white voters probably also see socially conscious progressives as unduly attached to cultural issues such as same-sex marriage and the death penalty—but, of course, on the opposing sides of these issues from the working class.

12. Joe Bageant's perspective is also that of a class migrant. He writes:

In the course of that circuitous journey between leaving Winchester, penniless and dumber than tree bark, and returning at age fifty-three, a modestly successful journalist and editor, I am now approximately a member of the middle class and one of the liberals at whom I so often poke fun. But a person's roots do not disappear just because he or she managed to narrowly cross the class lines that the American national story line claims do not exist. And what I see is that my people, the working folks in the old neighborhood—though they own more electronic gadgets and newer cars—are faring worse than when I left in quality of life and basic security.

BAGEANT, *supra* note 4, at 6.

13. WILLIAMS, *supra* note 1, at 155–56.

14. *Id.* at 151–214. Williams is hardly the first to link class to the culture wars. See, e.g., Martha T. McCluskey, *How Equality Became Elitist: The Cultural Politics of Economics from the Court to the “Nanny Wars,”* 35 SETON HALL L. REV. 1291, 1299–1300 (2005); Martha R. Mahoney, *Class and Status in American Law: Race, Interest, and the Anti-Transformation Cases*, 76 S. CALIF. L. REV. 799, 804 (2003) (citing E.P. THOMPSON, *THE MAKING OF THE ENGLISH WORKING CLASS* (1964)).

food—all are ways that those of us in the upper-middle class enact our higher class status for all to see.”¹⁵ But Williams goes a step further by also challenging the hierarchy of tastes and folkways, which holds that upper-class cultural practices are objectively superior to others. She contends that working-class “beliefs and lifestyles make as much sense in their context as our folkways do in ours.”¹⁶ In short, Williams does not assume that the upper-middle class are “class-less” or that theirs is the default culture. She thus does with regard to class one of the things critical race and feminist scholars have done for race and gender respectively: challenge the notion that whites don’t have race and that men don’t have gender. Also similar to critical race and feminist scholars, Williams demonstrates that an aspect of privilege is the opportunity to render that very privilege invisible.

Williams offers this scholarly contribution regarding class in relation to her interest in work-family issues because she says progressive elites (hereinafter “we” or “us”) need to understand and appreciate the working class if we are to make them our political allies. Williams cites ample evidence of the disdain in which the professional-managerial class hold the white working class, observing for example that “redneck jokes may be the last acceptable ethnic slurs in ‘polite’ society”¹⁷ and that academics “who would never utter a racial slur will casually refer to ‘trailer trash’ or ‘white trash.’”¹⁸ Williams decries such class-bashing by liberal elites: “The most refined fuel for class resentments is the culture of casual insults leveled by progressives toward the white working class. Changing U.S. politics will require an embargo on such insults.”¹⁹ Williams elaborates on several steps that the professional-managerial class should take:

15. WILLIAMS, *supra* note 1, at 212.

16. *Id.* (“It is not a matter of objective truth that workers’ religion is uncool, their desire for certainty pathetic, their taste excruciating.”).

17. *Id.* at 154 (quoting WORKING-CLASS WOMEN IN THE ACADEMY: LABORERS IN THE KNOWLEDGE FACTORY 293 (Michelle M. Tokarczyk & Elizabeth A. Fay eds., 1993)).

18. *Id.* (quoting MICHAEL ZWEIG, WHAT’S CLASS GOT TO DO WITH IT?: AMERICAN SOCIETY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY 166 (2004)). Poor whites in the South and Appalachia are arguably held in particular contempt by social progressives. See MATT WRAY, NOT QUITE WHITE: WHITE TRASH AND THE BOUNDARIES OF WHITENESS 46 (2006) (documenting use “white trash” from its origins in the antebellum South to “more general, nonlocalized term for poor rural whites in every part of the nation” after the Civil War); Mahoney, *supra* note 14, at 809 (asserting that privileged white Americans tend to see working-class white southerners in particular as racist); *id.* at 840 n.158 (noting that the middle class sometimes assume opposition to racism to be more common in higher status groups and rarely describe themselves “as afflicted with conflicts between moral claims and racial self-interest,” instead attributing “conflict between economics and social justice . . . to the working class”).

19. WILLIAMS, *supra* note 1, at 152.

The first is to institute the same kind of taboo against insulting white workers as now exists against using racial innuendo and insults. The second step is to accept the fact that class is a key axis of social disadvantage in American life and to learn more about life in the Missing Middle [among the working class], so that we do not inadvertently offend potential allies by signaling that we are clueless about our class privilege. The third step is to identify aspects of non-elite culture that offer useful insights for the upper-middle class.²⁰

Williams is absolutely correct that class is a critical axis of disadvantage in the United States,²¹ even as it has been overlooked by scholars or simply collapsed into analyses focusing on race, gender, sexuality, or some other basis of identity.²² Williams's indignation on behalf of the working class is well-founded, but she overlooks a recent shift in these class culture wars that she otherwise so aptly describes: the culture wars are now largely being fought—at least rhetorically—across the rural–urban divide.

Most recently and prominently, President Obama's perceived representation of the urban elite and Sarah Palin's frequent invocation of small-town America galvanized the geographical culture wars in the

20. *Id.* at 213 (suggesting “the norms of work devotion and concerted cultivation” as two possibilities). Elsewhere she implores progressives to “learn a lot more about their potential allies . . . because food, sports, vacations, and other practices and habits of the upper-middle class often are seen by working-class observers as expressions of class privilege,” resulting in what Williams calls the “class culture gap.” *Id.* at 152–53.

21. President Barack Obama has admitted as much in his suggestion that his daughters should not benefit from affirmative action, at least not in comparison to working-class whites. See Rachel L. Swarns, *For Obama, a Delicate Path on Race and Class*, N.Y. TIMES, Aug. 3, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/03/world/americas/03iht-obama.1.14965389.html?scp=4&sq=%22affirmative%20action%22%20and%20daughters%20and%20obama&st=cs>.

22. See BELL HOOKS, *WHERE WE STAND: CLASS MATTERS* 6 (2000) (“[T]he threat of class warfare, of class struggle, is just too dangerous to face. The neat binary categories of white and black or male and female are not there when it comes to class. How will they identify the enemy.”); June Carbone, *Unpacking Inequality and Class: Family, Gender and the Reconstruction of Class Barriers*, NEW ENG. L. REV. (forthcoming 2011) (on file with author) (writing that disadvantaged persons doing low wage work “often think of themselves in ethnic rather than economic terms, and indeed to the extent new groups replace other groups, economic position does not necessarily harden into a fixed group identity”); Angela P. Harris, *Theorizing Class, Gender and the Law: Three Approaches*, 72 L. & CONTEMP. PROBS. 37 (2009). Some have argued that class is different to other markers of identity because the working class do not necessarily want to stay in that class. Harris, *supra*, at 44 n.28 (quoting JOHN GUILLORY, *CULTURAL CAPITAL: THE PROBLEM OF LITERARY CANON FORMATION* 13 (1993)). Guillory writes, “Acknowledging the existence of admirable and even heroic elements of working-class culture, the affirmation of lower-class identity is hardly compatible with a program for the abolition of want.” *Id.* This assertion focuses on the material aspects of class while overlooking the cultural dimensions, which are significant components of identity for working-class whites, who may be proud to be “rednecks.” See JIM WEBB, *BORN FIGHTING: HOW THE SCOTS-IRISH SHAPED AMERICA* 181–82 (2004) (observing that rednecks “don’t particularly care what others think of them. To them, the joke has always been on those who utter the insult”).

2008 election cycle. As *New York Times* columnist David Brooks observed a month before the election, “[N]o American politician plays the class-warfare card as constantly as Palin. Nobody so relentlessly divides the world between the ‘normal Joe Sixpack American’ and the coastal elite.”²³ Frank Rich also identified the trend, referring to Palin’s “deftly coded putdown of her presumably shiftless big-city opponent” in what he called the “signature line” from her convention speech: “I guess a small-town mayor is sort of like a community organizer, except that you have actual responsibilities.”²⁴

Other journalists and pundits not only reported from the front line, many ultimately joined in battle. Gail Collins accurately referred to Palin’s “small towns vs. the world mantra,”²⁵ while also getting in a gratuitous dig about rurality and rural pursuits, e.g., Palin teaching us the difference between a caribou and a moose.²⁶ Indeed, hunting has proved an enduring emblem of the working class and, in particular, of Palin devotees, who Maureen Dowd of the *New York Times* recently accused of “eviscerating animals for fun.”²⁷ Recall that Williams lists sports as just

23. David Brooks, Op-Ed., *The Class War Before Palin*, N.Y. TIMES, Oct. 10, 2008, at A33, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/10/opinion/10brooks.html?ref=davidbrooks>.

24. Frank Rich, Op-Ed., *She Broke the G.O.P. and Now She Owns It*, N.Y. TIMES, July 11, 2009, at WK8, available at http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/12/opinion/12rich.html?_r=1.

25. Gail Collins, Op-Ed., *Thinking of Good Vibrations*, N.Y. TIMES, Nov. 6, 2008, at A33, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/06/opinion/06collins.html?scp=34&sq=election+op-ed&st=nyt>.

26. *Id.* Collins also observed that only about 106,000 people vote in Alaska, fewer than “in my immediate neighborhood!” She added, “What kind of state is this, anyway?” *Id.* This theme of rural people and rural states being unimportant because there are so few of them, while they are also politically overrepresented, was echoed in other columns. Gail Collins, Op-Ed., *August is the Cruellest Month*, N.Y. TIMES, Aug. 8, 2009, at A19, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/08/opinion/08collins.html?ref=gailcollins> (stating that Senator Max Baucus of Montana assembled a special bipartisan negotiating committee on healthcare whose members “hail from Montana, North Dakota, New Mexico, Iowa, Maine and Wyoming. This was quite a coup on Baucus’s part, since you have to work really hard to put together six states that represent only 2.77 percent of the population.”); David Brooks & Gail Collins, Op-Ed., *This Just in from Montana*, N.Y. TIMES, Aug. 25, 2010, <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/08/25/this-just-in-from-montana> (dismissing Montana residents’ anti-Washington sentiment, in part because “Montana gets \$1.47 back for every dollar it sends to Washington, and that the folks in Montana who feel they’re so powerless, each have 36 times the representation in the U.S. Senate as a resident of California”).

Steve Berg of *MinnPost* made some similar points about Palin and the geographical component of the culture wars but without the rural-bashing. He referred to Palin as “ambassador of small-town virtue and small-town grit.” Steve Berg, *Irony and Small Towns on the Campaign Trail*, MINNPOST, Sept. 8, 2008, http://www.minnpost.com/steveberg/2008/09/08/3422/irony_and_small_towns_on_the_campaign_trail. He further articulated a series of binaries representing the two camps in the culture wars: “[S]mall town against big city, talk radio and Fox News against ‘mainstream media,’ heartland against elite.” *Id.*

27. Maureen Dowd, Op-Ed., *Pass the Caribou Stew*, N.Y. TIMES, Dec. 8, 2010, at A35, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/08/opinion/08dowd.html>.

one of the practices or habits by which we exhibit our class.²⁸ Meanwhile, Joe Bageant reminds us that the sporting endeavors of liberal elites are just as inexplicable to the working class; he names rock climbing and wind surfing as two examples that cause the working class to shake their heads in derision.²⁹

Other pundits commented on Palin's use of language—treating her folksiness as evidence she was unprepared or unfit to hold high office. Maureen Dowd, for example, poked fun at Palin's use of colloquialisms like “darn right,” “doggone it,” and “reward's in heaven,”³⁰ yet these are standard linguistic fare for many Americans. As Joan Williams argues regarding various other manifestations of working-class culture,³¹ objectively speaking, nothing is wrong with these phrases. One is simply an idiom, and many see the others as preferable to curse words.³²

To be honest, I too found myself laughing at many of these digs, albeit uneasily. Doing so was made easier because I was and am a staunch Obama supporter. Like many others, I am skeptical that Palin possesses the experience, education, or good judgment to hold high-level office, and I disagree with her on every major issue. But finding bases for criticizing Palin on substantive grounds was and is, to quote Thomas Friedman, like “shooting fish in a barrel”³³ (why is Friedman permitted to be colloquial while Palin is not?). Given that so much in addition to style distinguished the Republican and Democratic presidential tickets from each other, I am not sure why the media devoted such attention to Palin's cultural trappings. From the perspective of many rural or working-class voters, the mainstream media struck below the belt when it came to Palin. Her martyrdom at the media's hands only fueled their

28. WILLIAMS, *supra* note 1, at 152–53.

29. BAGEANT, *supra* note 4, at 68–70; *see also* WILLIAMS, *supra* note 1, at 213 (observing that the disdain between the opposing sides in the culture wars flows both ways).

30. Maureen Dowd, Op-Ed., *Sarah's Pompom Palaver*, N.Y. TIMES, Oct. 5, 2008, at WK11, available at http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/05/opinion/05dowd.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=pom%20pom%20palaver&st=cse&oref=slogin.

31. WILLIAMS, *supra* note 1, at 212.

32. I have been unable to find evidence that the national media derided folksy politicians from earlier eras, such as President Lyndon Baines Johnson and Sam Rayburn, Speaker of the House. The media described, for example, the contrast between Rayburn's Washington and Texas personas and activities. *See* Edward T. Folliard, *Rayburn, A Mighty Power in Government*, WASH. POST & TIMES HERALD, Nov. 17, 1961, at B9 (providing an overview of Rayburn's rise in Washington); *Rayburn Elected in House Tradition*, N.Y. TIMES, Sept. 17, 1940, at 19 (highlighting Rayburn's background as a farmer). Further, the press did not poke fun at Bill Clinton's occasional folksiness, though this may be in part because he was a member of the “credentialed class.” *See infra* note 54.

33. Thomas L. Friedman, Op-Ed., *Palin's Kind of Patriotism*, N.Y. TIMES, Oct. 8, 2008, at A31, available at http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/08/opinion/08friedman.html?_r=1. Indeed, as reflected in this column, Friedman is a good example of a commentator who criticized Palin on the substance while generally steering clear of cultural issues.

sense that the mainstream media is hopelessly biased and untrustworthy. In short, the media's handling of Palin effectively confirmed rural Americans' fears that liberal elites had written them off "as a relic, or worse, as a joke."³⁴

In the midst of all this, Obama occasionally lived up to the reputation for urban elitism that had dogged his Democratic nominee predecessors John Kerry and Al Gore. Most notably, Obama made his "biggest unforced error" in April 2008 in a gaffe that came to be known as Bittergate. It was a stumble that explicitly invoked the rural-urban divide. Speaking at a fundraiser in San Francisco, Obama said:

You go into these small towns in Pennsylvania, and like a lot of small towns in the Midwest, the jobs have been gone now for twenty years and nothing's replaced them. And they fell through the Clinton administration, and the Bush administration, and each successive administration has said that somehow these communities are gonna regenerate and they have not.

And it's not surprising then they get bitter, they cling to guns or religion or antipathy to people who aren't like them or anti-immigrant sentiment or anti-trade sentiment as a way to explain their frustrations.³⁵

34. Matt Bai, *Working for the Working Class Vote*, N.Y. TIMES MAG., Oct. 15, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/19/magazine/19obama-t.html?scp=1&sq=matt%20bai%20working%20for%20the%20working%20class%20vote&st=cse>. This backlash against rural people is in contrast to decades of idyll-izing nostalgia and sentimentality about rural people and places. See Pruitt, *Rural Rhetoric*, *supra* note 8, at 212–25; Ann R. Tickamyer & Debra A. Henderson, *Rural Women: New Roles for the New Century?*, in CHALLENGES FOR RURAL AMERICA IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY 109, 112 (David L. Brown & Louis E. Swanson eds., 2004) (describing rural communities as "wholesome, family-friendly environments that promote overall well-being"); W.K. KELLOGG FOUND., PERCEPTIONS OF RURAL AMERICA: CONGRESSIONAL PERSPECTIVES 3–4 (2004), available at <http://www.wkcf.org/knowledge-center/resources/2004/04/Perceptions-Of-Rural-America-Views-From-The-US-Congress.aspx> (finding most people associate the word "rural" with traditional values such as family, community, and religion). Indeed, despite his widely held association with the urban, Barack Obama promised during his campaign for the presidency to hold a rural summit if he were elected, stating, "What's good for rural America will be good for America. The values that are represented . . . are values that built America, and we've got to preserve them." See Howard Berkes, *Rural America to Obama: Remember Us*, NPR, Nov. 22, 2008, available at <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=97307012>. The rural summit hasn't materialized, but Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack and several other cabinet secretaries participated in what they billed as a Rural Listening Tour in 2009. Bill Bishop, *Obama Sends Cabinet Secretaries to Rural Communities*, DAILY YONDER (July 1, 2009), <http://www.dailyyonder.com/obama-sends-cabinet-secretaries-rural-communities/2009/07/01/2207>.

35. David Plouffe, *Bittergate*, DAILY BEAST (Nov. 3, 2009), <http://www.thedailybeast.com/blogs-and-stories/2009-11-03/bittergate/>. Williams discusses Bittergate as an example of how easily an astute politician like Obama can slip up when it comes to class. WILLIAMS, *supra* note 1, at 190–91. One example of how a rural working-class voter responded to Obama's comments is this: "That comment he made about guns and religion, it's frightening, you have to admit." Anne Hull, *Disconnected from Obama's America: Arkansans Wary of President-Elect's Urban Perspec-*

Obama later explained himself and his comments to journalist Matt Bai for a *New York Times Magazine* story headlined *Working for the Working Class Vote*:

How it was interpreted in the press was Obama talking to a bunch of wine-sipping San Francisco liberals with an anthropological view toward white working-class voters. And I was actually making the reverse point, clumsily, which is that these voters have a right to be frustrated because they've been ignored. And because Democrats haven't met them halfway on cultural issues, we've not been able to communicate to them effectively an economic agenda that would help broaden our coalition. . . .

. . . .
I mean, part of what I was trying to say to that group in San Francisco was, "You guys need to stop thinking that issues like religion or guns are somehow wrong . . ." Because, in fact, if you've grown up and your dad went out and took you hunting, and that is part of your self-identity and provides you a sense of continuity and stability that is unavailable in your economic life, then that's going to be pretty important, and rightfully so. And if you're watching your community lose population and collapse but your church is still strong and the life of the community is centered around that, well then, you know, we'd better be paying attention to that. . . .

. . . .
. . . To act like hunting, like somebody who wants firearms just doesn't get it—that kind of condescension has to be purged from our vocabulary.³⁶

Interestingly, Obama's explanation of his gaffe is remarkably similar to Joan Williams's arguments regarding class: before we can effectively reach out to the working class we have to try to understand them. And that will require an end to the condescension. We must change the way we think about the white working class. Even more remarkable is that Obama's explanation is a high-brow, low-emotion synopsis of Joe Bageant's 2007 book, the provocatively titled *Deer Hunting with Jesus*.³⁷ Bageant offers a highly sympathetic and compassionate explanation of

tive, WASH. POST, Jan. 16, 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/01/15/AR2009011504254.html>. "Frightening" strikes me as a telling word choice that provides some evidence of just how great the cultural rift is. I may have a double consciousness as both rural and urban, working class and professional-managerial class, but the word "frightening" seems very strong—and obviously reflects emotion. It also illustrates the significance of perspective in the context of the culture wars. The woman in rural Arkansas finds Obama's comments frightening, but socially conscious progressives might find frightening her use of that word to describe those comments.

36. Bai, *supra* note 34, at 1 (quoting President Obama).

37. BAGEANT, *supra* note 4.

why working-class voters seem so clueless regarding their economic well-being, focusing instead on cultural issues such as guns and religion. I shall discuss Bageant's book further below, but for now will observe only that I suspect that Obama or a staffer had read the book,³⁸ which was published a year before Bittergate.

Bittergate, and Obama's explanation of it, support my argument that the culture wars have taken an increasingly vivid and significant geographical turn. Obama referred to religion, hunting, and population loss—all phenomena associated with rural communities, albeit not exclusively. Obama thus conflated "working-class voters" with "rural voters." Indeed, Obama specified the geographical setting of these voters who flummox us: "small towns."

Bai, too, collapsed "rural" and "working class." The story's headline referred to the working-class vote, but Bai deployed the word "rural" nineteen times to refer to the sort of voters Obama was trying to woo. In addition, the story featured rural vignettes from the campaign trail, most prominently one from Lebanon, Virginia, population 3,194, in the Appalachian part of the state.³⁹ Bai explained the importance of the rural vote, using Virginia as an example:

For a National Democrat, the hardest part of the electoral formula [in Virginia] is probably the last piece—holding one's own in the sea of small towns in the southern and Appalachian regions of the state that are far more similar to the rest of the Deep South than they are to Virginia's northern counties. Voters here haven't known economic expansion in decades, and they seem to have decided long ago that neither party was especially serious about stopping the decline, or even knew how. There is a strong sense in these communities, and not unreasonably, of suffering endless condescension—a feeling that urbane America has already written off the rural lifestyle as a relic or, worse, as a joke. For that reason (and this is actually the point Obama says he was trying to make in San Francisco), cultural issues matter far more in the rural areas than they do in the exurbs, because voters see those issues as a test of whether politicians respect their values or mock them—a construct that Republican strategists have become expert at exploiting.⁴⁰

Bai also discussed Obama's efforts in other states considered Republican territory, some of them in the South and many with significant rural populations: North Carolina, Indiana, Montana, Nevada, North Da-

38. See *id.* at 25, 35, 68 (discussing why John Kerry lacked support among working-class voters).

39. *American FactFinder*, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, <http://factfinder.census.gov> (search "Lebanon" and select Virginia from the state list, then refer to 2005–2009 tab) (last visited Feb. 22, 2011).

40. Bai, *supra* note 34, at 4.

kota, and Georgia.⁴¹ Clearly, a lot of the working-class voters for whom Obama was working were rural.⁴²

Indeed, there were moments in the 2008 presidential election when one could almost have been fooled into thinking that rural voters mattered.⁴³ A few months before the election, one analyst wrote: “[T]he [2004] election came down to a handful of small towns in southern Ohio. If those and other small towns vote their pocketbooks, Obama should rally to win. If they hold to their cultural roots, McCain should win.”⁴⁴ Just two weeks before the election, a poll indicated that John McCain had lost ground among rural voters, the very ones credited with putting George W. Bush in the White House in 2000 and 2004.⁴⁵ A Republican pollster declared that the election would “be fought in cities with populations between 50,000 and 100,000 residents.”⁴⁶ Post-election analysis, however, was less generous regarding the import of the rural vote.

41. *Id.* at 2; see also John Harwood, *The Caucus: The White Working Class: Forgotten Voters No More*, N.Y. TIMES, May 26, 2008, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9507E4DF103FF935A15756C0A96E9C8B63&scp=1&sq=ruy+teixeira+harwood&st=nyt> (discussing Obama’s efforts to win working-class voters with no mention of “rural” but discussing Hillary Clinton’s successes in states like Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio and Pennsylvania).

42. See Barbara Pini et al., *Teachers and the Emotional Dimension of Class in Resource-Affected Rural Australia*, 31 BRIT. J. SOC. EDUC. 17, 21 (2010) (suggesting that rural and working class get conflated in Australia).

43. See, e.g., Tim Murphy & Bill Bishop, *Barack Obama Leads in Rural Contributions*, DAILY YONDER (Sept. 16, 2007), <http://www.dailyyonder.com/barack-obama-leads-rural-contributions>.

44. Berg, *supra* note 26. Bill Clinton, campaigning for Democratic candidates during the 2010 mid-term elections, suggested similar thinking when he “warned voters, ‘You are being played,’ and urged people to cast ballots with their economic self interest in mind.” Jeff Zeleny, *Democrats’ Grip on the South Continues to Slip*, N.Y. TIMES, Oct. 19, 2010, at A18, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/19/us/politics/19south.html?scp=11&sq=bill+clinton+economy&st=nyt>.

45. Howard Berkes, *Poll: McCain Lost Key Rural Support in Early October*, NPR, Oct. 23, 2008, available at <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=96008609>. Berkes reported, “McCain was doing so poorly among a key voter group during the first three weeks of October, it seemed unlikely he could capture the presidency.” *Id.* He went on to put this finding in perspective in relation to past elections:

“In 2004, George Bush won the rural parts of the battleground [states] by 15 points,” notes Anna Greenberg, the Democratic pollster who conducted the bipartisan survey. “It was his base, and he got a massive amount of voters to turn out in those battleground states. It drove his victory.”

But in 2008, Greenberg says, “John McCain is struggling just to win the rural vote in the battleground. That was supposed to be his base. If he can’t win the rural battleground with substantial margins . . . it seems very unlikely that he can win this election.”

Id.

46. Berg, *supra* note 26. The pollster continued: “Instead of going to Detroit and Cleveland, you’re going to see [the Republican ticket] a lot more in the small towns.” *Id.*; see also Howard Berkes, *supra* note 45.

In 2004, “Urban areas voted overwhelmingly Democratic, and rural areas voted overwhelmingly Republican,” says Bill Bishop, author of *The Big Sort*, which compares 30 years of demographic data and election returns. Four years ago, rural counties gave Pres-

Journalists reporting and analyzing the election contemplated whether the rural South mattered anymore.⁴⁷ Some noted that the number of rural voters has fallen significantly in just the last two decades.⁴⁸ In fact, analysts disagreed on the role of the rural vote in Obama's win, finding myriad ways to slice and dice the data. Obama carried the rural vote in a dozen states,⁴⁹ faring better among rural voters than John Kerry had in 2004.⁵⁰ Still, Obama garnered less support from rural voters than

ident Bush a margin of 4.1 million votes. That was enough to overcome John Kerry's margin of 3.7 million votes in urban counties. Bishop says the question now is, "Will the Republican Party be able to maintain those [rural] margins to offset what clearly will be a strong vote for Barack Obama [in cities]?"

Id.

47. See Hull, *supra* note 35 (commenting on the perceived cultural disconnect between Obama and rural residents of Arkansas, most of whom did not support Obama); Adam Nossiter, *For South, A Waning Hold on National Politics*, N.Y. TIMES, Nov. 11, 2008, at A1, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/11/us/politics/11south.html?hp> (arguing that, by voting for John McCain, "voters from Texas to South Carolina and Kentucky may have marginalized their region for some time to come"). Nossiter also wrote:

Southern counties that voted more heavily Republican this year than in 2004 tended to be poorer, less educated and whiter, a statistical analysis by The New York Times shows. Mr. Obama won in only 44 counties in the Appalachian belt, a stretch of 410 counties that runs from New York to Mississippi. Many of those counties, rural and isolated, have been less exposed to the diversity, educational achievement and economic progress experienced by more prosperous areas.

Id. Frank Rich made a similar point:

Those occasional counties that tilted more Republican in 2008 tended to be not only the least diverse, but also the most rural, least educated and slowest-growing in population. McCain–Palin did score a landslide among white evangelical Christians, though even in that demographic Obama shaved the G.O.P. margin by seven percentage points from 2004.

Frank Rich, Op-Ed., *The Moose Stops Here*, N.Y. TIMES, Nov. 16, 2008, at WK12, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/16/opinion/16rich.html?scp=22&sq=election+op-ed&st=nyt>. Indeed, late 2010 data and analysis suggested that Sarah Palin supporters tend to be "Republicans with lower incomes and lower educational attainment." Nate Silver, *Sarah Palin's Nomination Chances: A Reassessment*, N.Y. TIMES, Dec. 31, 2010, <http://fivethirtyeight.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/12/31/sarah-palins-nomination-chances-a-reassessment/?hp>.

48. Nate Silver, *How Obama Really Won the Election*, ESQUIRE, Jan. 14, 2009, available at <http://www.esquire.com/features/data/how-obama-won-0209?src=rss> ("In 1992, when Bill Clinton won his first term, 35 percent of American voters were identified as rural according to that year's national exit polls, and 24 percent as urban. This year, however, the percentage of rural voters has dropped to 21 percent, while that of urban voters has climbed to 30. The suburbs, meanwhile, have been booming: 41 percent of America's electorate in 1992, they represent 49 percent now . . .").

49. Tim Murphy & Bill Bishop, *The 2008 Election: State by State*, DAILY YONDER (Dec 5, 2008), <http://www.dailyyonder.com/2008-election-state-state/2008/12/05/1789>. The twelve states were California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Hampshire, New Mexico, South Carolina, Vermont, and Wisconsin. *Id.*

50. Silver, *supra* note 48 (noting that the McCain–Palin ticket beat Obama by just 2.4 million votes in rural areas, whereas Bush won a 4.3 million vote margin among rural voters, and suggesting that McCain would have been wiser to target the suburban vote rather than the rural vote); see also Rich, *supra* note 47 (noting that the McCain–Palin ticket "score[d] a landslide among white evangel-

from other demographic slices. Obama carried each of the seventeen most densely populated states,⁵¹ a list that included Indiana and Ohio, which had supported Bush in 2004.⁵² Frank Rich pointed out that the “occasional counties that tilted more Republican in 2008 [than in 2004] tended to be not only the least diverse, but also the most rural, least educated, and slowest-growing in population.”⁵³ By and large, the media did not acknowledge that many rural residents were among the swing voters who bestowed on Democrats the big political victory—one that included U.S. Senate and House seats, as well as considerable support for Obama.

Commentators didn’t let go of the rural–urban binary in the aftermath of the election, and the rural-bashing eventually escalated. On election night, NPR declared Obama the “first urban Democrat to be president since really Truman.” Or was Obama the most recent northern urban president since JFK, another commentator queried. Both agreed that Obama, like other recent presidents, was a member of the “credentialed class.”⁵⁴ Indeed, the rhetorical victory lap of left-leaning media pundits included a celebration of the cosmopolitan, the urbane, the privileged—in short, a celebration of their own ilk. One manifestation was David Brooks’s column a few weeks after Obama’s election in which Brooks smugly listed the Ivy League credentials of the Obamas and many who were likely to serve in the Obama Administration.⁵⁵

Jan. 20, 2009, will be a historic day. Barack Obama (Columbia, Harvard Law) will take the oath of office as his wife, Michelle (Princeton, Harvard Law), looks on proudly. Nearby, his foreign policy advisers will stand beaming, including perhaps Hillary Clinton (Wellesley, Yale Law), Jim Steinberg (Harvard, Yale Law) and Susan Rice (Stanford, Oxford D. Phil.).

The domestic policy team will be there, too, including Jason Furman (Harvard, Harvard Ph.D.), Austan Goolsbee (Yale, M.I.T.

ical Christians” although Obama “shaved the G.O.P. margin by seven percentage points from 2004”).

51. Silver, *supra* note 48 (noting that these states included Virginia and North Carolina).

52. David Brooks, Op-Ed., *Midwest at Dusk*, N.Y. TIMES, Nov. 5, 2010, at A33, available at http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/05/opinion/05brooks.html?_r=1&hp (noting that Obama also carried Iowa, which had supported Bush in 2004).

53. Rich, *supra* note 47 (“The Republicans lost every region of the country by double digits except the South, which they won by less than double digits (9 points). They took the South only because McCain, who ran roughly even with Obama among whites in every other region, won Southern whites by 38 percentage points.”).

54. Election-night coverage (NPR radio broadcast Nov. 4, 2008) (at the moment the network declared Obama the winner) (transcript on file with author).

55. David Brooks, Op-Ed., *The Insider’s Crusade*, N.Y. TIMES, Nov. 21, 2008, at A35, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/21/opinion/21brooks.html?scp=1&sq=insider%27s+crusade&st=nyt>.

Ph.D.), Blair Levin (Yale, Yale Law), Peter Orszag (Princeton, London School of Economics Ph.D.) and, of course, the White House Counsel Greg Craig (Harvard, Yale Law).

This truly will be an administration that looks like America, or at least that slice of America that got double 800s on their SATs. Even more than past administrations, this will be a valedictocracy—rule by those who graduate first in their high school classes. If a foreign enemy attacks the United States during the Harvard-Yale game any time over the next four years, we're screwed.⁵⁶

Even as he poked fun at this lot by calling them “overeducated Achievators,” Brooks embraced their homogeneity as elites and Washington insiders.⁵⁷

In perhaps the most off-putting part of the column, Brooks implicitly acknowledged how these elites pass down their privilege to their children: “So many of them send their kids to Georgetown Day School, the posh leftish private school in D.C., that they’ll be able to hold White House staff meetings in the carpool line.”⁵⁸ I suspect that any working-class cog reading Brooks’s column felt nauseated—or really angry.⁵⁹ Such comments only fuel the sense among middle Americans—whether the “Missing Middle” (aka working class),⁶⁰ those living in the “flyover” states, or the large group who fall into both categories—that the Obama Administration and liberal elites are an exclusive clique, living in a world that is beyond their reach and maybe even beyond their imagination.⁶¹

56. *Id.*

57. *Id.*

58. *Id.* I am reminded of Bageant’s reference to the wealthy sending their children to private schools as a basis of working-class resentment against them. BAGEANT, *supra* note 4, at 102. This is somewhat ironic, of course, since many in the working class purport not to value education. *Id.* at 10, 70. They may therefore not perceive class injury as manifest in lack of access to better education. Educational attainment may be something that working-class folks do not aspire to because it is so far from their grasp. *See infra* note 61.

59. *See* BAGEANT, *supra* note 4, at 101 (talking about “class hate between whites”). Bageant writes of the selfishness of the rich, who want to sock away more wealth for their own children, even as they are unconcerned about the broader well-being of society. *Id.* at 28. I borrow the term “cog” from Bageant, who notes that working whites “are good cogs and show great deference toward any type of authority. At work many are treated like children.” *Id.* at 171. Williams makes a similar point about the working class raising their children to be good factory workers. WILLIAMS, *supra* note 1, at 166–67 (quoting ALFRED LUBRANO, LIMBO: BLUE-COLLAR ROOTS, WHITE-COLLAR DREAMS 10 (2004)) (“In the working class, people perform jobs in which they are closely supervised and are required to follow orders and instructions. [So they bring their children] up in a home in which conformity, obedience, and intolerance for back talk are the norm—the same characteristics that make for a good factory worker.”).

60. *See infra* note 107 (discussing Williams’s taxonomy, which equates these).

61. I believe this is part of the reason that working-class voters focus on cultural issues rather than economic ones. It is also consistent with Jennifer Sherman’s description of working-class voters seeing economic issues as “distant and untouchable.” SHERMAN, *supra* note 4, at 100.

If this seems hypersensitive on behalf of the working class, I am no more sensitive than Williams, who compares working-class wounds to sunburn, “[S]o painful that the slightest touch makes you pull away, wincing.”⁶² I think working-class Americans could have done without the gloating, though at least Brooks was sufficiently honest—and aware—to title the column *The Insider’s Crusade* and to laugh at the “vast, heaving O-phoria now sweeping the coastal haute bourgeoisie.”⁶³ What Brooks didn’t acknowledge, perhaps because he doesn’t realize it—or doesn’t see it as relevant—is that none of those listed in his “valedictocracy” is from a working-class background, except the Obamas themselves.⁶⁴ If they were all first in their high-school classes, I daresay none of those high schools was a mediocre (or worse) public school in middle America.

62. WILLIAMS, *supra* note 1, at 190.

63. Brooks, *supra* note 55. Indeed, it was not Brooks’s only recent reference to the relevance of geography. See Brooks, *supra* note 52 (asserting that the Midwest, which he defines broadly as starting in “central New York and Pennsylvania and then stretch[ing] out through Ohio and Indiana before spreading out to include Wisconsin and Arkansas” is “the beating center of American life—the place where the trajectory of American politics is being determined” and that while “people on the coasts” might associate the sixties with Woodstock, people in the Midwest “might remember the last time there were plenty of good jobs instead.”); David Brooks, Op-Ed., *The Limits of Policy*, N.Y. TIMES, May 4, 2010, at A31, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/04/opinion/04brooks.html?adxnml=1&ref=homepage&src=me&adxnmlx=1292166022-N0k1HZ/Y4Xu1WWuGCLxj2A>. In this column, Brooks asserts:

The region you live in also makes a gigantic difference in how you will live. There are certain high-trust regions where highly educated people congregate, producing positive feedback loops of good culture and good human capital programs. This mostly happens in the northeastern states like New Jersey and Connecticut. There are other regions with low social trust, low education levels and negative feedback loops. This mostly happens in southern states like Arkansas and West Virginia.

Id.

64. I consider President Obama to be from a working-class background based on his descriptions of his upbringing—largely by his maternal grandparents—in Hawaii. BARACK OBAMA, *DREAMS FROM MY FATHER: A STORY OF RACE AND INHERITANCE* (1995); see also Helen Joy Policar, *The Shadow of the American Dream: The Clash of Class Ascension and Shame*, 31 REVISION 19, 19 (2010) (describing Obama’s background as working class). But see WILLIAMS, *supra* note 1, at 191 (discussing Maureen Dowd’s assertion that Obama is out of touch with the working class because his mother had a Ph.D. in anthropology). At the very least, the various influences in Obama’s upbringing illustrate the slipperiness of class. Although his working-class, maternal grandparents did his day-to-day raising, his mother no doubt exposed him to the “life of the mind.” See BAGEANT, *supra* note 4, at 10 (discussing the “intellectual bareness and brutality of the [working-class] environment”); *id.* at 70 (discussing the luxury of time for the working class, who see liberals with time to read—and even be in book clubs—as suspect); cf. WILLIAMS, *supra* note 1, at 168 (assuming the working class are less focused on teaching their children academic material because of a desire to let them be kids until they are old enough to have to assume responsibility). As for Michelle Obama, the *New York Times* published her family tree. Gabriel Dance & Elisabeth Goodridge, *The Family Tree of Michelle Obama, The First Lady*, N.Y. TIMES, Oct. 7, 2009, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2009/10/08/us/politics/20091008-obama-family-tree.html?scp=17&sq=swarns%20obama&st=cse>.

The Brooks column illustrates how the victorious Democrats and the liberal media, basking in the glow of the big win, were not the most gracious of winners. Frank Rich aptly characterized commentary like that of Brooks as “Washington’s cheerleading for our new New Frontier cabinet superstars”⁶⁵ Rich used David Halberstam’s book, *The Best and the Brightest*, to discuss what might be missing from Obama’s team, observing that the irony Halberstam intended by his book’s title had often been lost:

In his 20th-anniversary reflections, Halberstam wrote that his favorite passage in his book was the one where Johnson, after his first Kennedy cabinet meeting, raved to his mentor, the speaker of the House, Sam Rayburn, about all the president’s brilliant men. “You may be right, and they may be every bit as intelligent as you say,” Rayburn responded, “but I’d feel a whole lot better about them if just one of them had run for sheriff once.”⁶⁶

Rich was not so much standing up for the wisdom of small-town (or small-time) politicians as he was questioning the professional experiences of some of Obama’s hotshot financial advisors. Nevertheless, the Rayburn quote makes another point: diversity of personal history and life experiences is surely desirable on a leadership team,⁶⁷ especially one

65. Frank Rich, Op-Ed., *The Brightest Are Not Always the Best*, N.Y. TIMES, Dec. 7, 2008, at WK9, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/07/opinion/07rich.html?em>.

66. *Id.* The column continued, “Halberstam loved that story because it underlined the weakness of the Kennedy team: ‘the difference between intelligence and wisdom, between the abstract quickness and verbal facility which the team exuded, and true wisdom, which is the product of hard-won, often bitter experience.’” *Id.*

67. Rural advocates have criticized Obama appointees collectively for a lack of such diversity of experience and, in particular, the absence of those with rural backgrounds. See Bill Bishop, *Speak Your Piece: Running for Sheriff*, DAILY YONDER (Dec. 20, 2010), <http://www.dailyyonder.com/speak-your-peace-running-sheriff/2010/12/17/3089> (“The White House chose 25 people to serve on its Council for Community Solutions. . . . Not one lived in rural America—a loss for the Council and for President Obama. . . . We’re not the first to notice President Obama’s attraction to thick resumes, coastal connections and Ivy League diplomas. This White House would sniff at a degree from a land grant school. So when it came time to pick a Supreme Court justice, nobody from rural America was considered. And the Obama Administration’s education policy is utterly urban centric.”); Lisa R. Pruitt, *A Cabinet Post for Culture, But Would It Include the Rural Variety?*, LEGAL RURALISM BLOG (Sept. 27, 2008 7:27 AM), <http://legalruralism.blogspot.com/2008/12/cabinet-post-for-culture-but-would-it.html> (“I guess I am looking pretty hard for signs that someone is thinking about rural America as we prepare for the inauguration of a very cosmopolitan President and his incredibly urbane cabinet.”). But see Editorial, *Obama’s Well-Stocked Cabinet*, L.A. TIMES, Dec. 28, 2008, <http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/la-ed-cabinet28-2008dec28,0,1331420.story> (overlooking the cabinet’s lack of rural representation and ignoring class in announcing that Obama has picked a cabinet that “looks like America” by “assembling an impressive roster that includes men and women, blacks, whites, Latinos and Asian Americans”).

leading a nation in which 70% of citizens remain working class.⁶⁸

Many journalists commented on Obama's urban-ness pre-election and his urbane-ness in the post-election period. Nate Silver suggested in *Esquire* magazine that Obama might be the first urban President, calling him "unmistakably urban: pragmatic, *superior*, hip, stubborn, multicultural."⁶⁹ Silver also referred to Obama as "the only American president in recent history to seem unembarrassed about claiming a personal residence in a major U.S. city. Instead, presidents have tended to hail from homes called ranches or groves or manors or plantations, in places called Kennebunkport or Santa Barbara or Oyster Bay or Northampton."⁷⁰ Rachel Swarns of the *New York Times* praised the Obamas for being out and about in Washington, D.C., characterizing them as "city people . . . who have long felt at home in the urban landscape."⁷¹ Anne Hull wrote in the *Washington Post* of Obama's "global, biracial polish."⁷² Thus, as our nation gloriously transcended the race divide—if only by one significant measure⁷³—it further embraced a geographic or spatial divide, one in which rural folk became a new "other."⁷⁴

68. See *infra* notes 112–13 and accompanying text. This points up the diversity value not only of those with rural backgrounds, but also of class migrants.

69. Silver, *supra* note 48 (emphasis added).

70. *Id.* ("We may still romanticize some of the more familiar, rurally oriented narratives of presidents past: the Ronald Reagan frontiersman caricature (which both Sarah Palin and John McCain tried to co-opt at various times) or the Bill Clinton born-in-a-small-town shtick (see also: Edwards, John; Huckabee, Mike)."); see also Rachel L. Swarns, *Could It Really Be Him? Yeah, Probably*, N.Y. TIMES, Mar. 26, 2009, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9D0DEEDA1330F935A15750C0A96F9C8B63&scp=5&sq=swarns+obama+urban&st=nyt> (describing President Obama as "the first president since Richard M. Nixon to be elected while living in a city neighborhood, in his case, Chicago's racially and economically diverse Hyde Park").

71. Swarns, *supra* note 70.

72. See Hull, *supra* note 35 (commenting on the perceived cultural disconnect between Obama and rural residents of Arkansas, most of whom did not support Obama).

73. See Rachel L. Swarns, *Blacks Debate Civil Rights Risk in Obama's Rise*, N.Y. TIMES, Aug. 25, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/25/world/americas/25iht-25race.15597713.html?scp=56&sq=swarns%20obama&st=cse>. This notion that race no longer matters is often reflected in the phrase "post-race America," though many see this as a myth that stymies progress in addressing disparities according to race. See Charles A. Gallagher, *Color-Blind Privilege: The Social and Political Functions of Erasing the Color Line in Post-Race America*, 10 RACE, GENDER & CLASS 575 (2004) "Embracing a post-race, color-blind perspective provides whites with a degree of psychological comfort by allowing them to imagine that being white or black or brown has no bearing on an individual's or a group's relative place in the socioeconomic hierarchy." *Id.* at 576. The phrase "post-race" has been particularly prevalent since President Obama's election. See Mario L. Barnes, Erwin Chemerinsky & Trina Jones, *A Post-Race Equal Protection?*, 98 GEO. L.J. 967 (2010) (observing that "the United States appears to be in a state of racial fatigue. . . . Post-racialism makes it unnecessary to focus on the problems. Being post-racial feels good" *Id.* at 976. "[O]ne of the most significant problems with the current post-race moment" is that it "does not adequately account for the disparate conditions under which many people of color struggle." *Id.* at 982. The Association of American Law Schools (AALS) held a 2010 Mid-Year Meeting exploring this theme. *Workshop on "Post-Racial" Civil Rights Law, Politics and Legal Education: New and Old Color Lines in the Age of Obama*, THE ASS'N OF AM. L. SCH. (June 8–12, 2010), <https://memberaccess.aals.org/>

Practically speaking, the consequences of the Democrats' across-the-board win did not end with a rhetorical victory lap. Stimulus dollars became part of the spoils of victory, and debates about how the funds should be spent often pitted rural interests against urban ones. Post-election conversations about spending echoed pre-election rhetoric about pork-barrel politics that would benefit states with small and sparse populations. A piece featuring the pejorative title *Village Idiocy* appeared in the *New Republic* just before the election,⁷⁵ about the time the much-discussed “bridge to nowhere” became a metaphor for allegedly wasteful spending. It was a metaphor with rural overtones because the actual bridge at stake was to link the town of Ketchikan, Alaska, population 7,640,⁷⁶ with its airport. The per capita cost of the bridge was indeed high, but the widely embraced metaphor was dismissive—even derisive—of rural residents and their needs. In arguing that the focus of stimulus spending should be metropolitan infrastructure projects, the Brookings Institute called for a “bridge to somewhere.”⁷⁷ Meanwhile, the *New York Times* referred to federal spending for broadband infrastructure

eWeb/DynamicPage.aspx?webcode=myinfo&Reg_evt_key=25c62e71-9fc9-4177-830d-109991854830&RegPath=EventRegFees.

74. Cf. Debra Lyn Bassett, *Ruralism*, 88 IOWA L. REV. 273, 292–98 (2003) (documenting negative rural stereotypes in popular culture well before the 2008 election).

75. Bradley & Katz, *supra* note 5. The story was not quite as negative about rural America as the title suggests. Bradley and Katz, of the Brookings Institute, were primarily arguing that the nation should be invested in metropolitan areas rather than in rural or nonmetropolitan ones. In that context, they challenged “the idea that we are a nation of small towns,” writing, “Palin’s positioning may appeal to a certain nostalgia that Americans have about small-town life, but the Manichean dichotomy of city versus small town (not to mention “urban” candidate versus “rural” one) no longer describes the radically connected and interdependent way Americans live and work.” *Id.*

76. *American FactFinder*, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, <http://factfinder.census.gov> (search “Ketchikan City” and select Alaska from the state list, then refer to 2005–2009 tab). Sarah Palin denounced the project at the Republican National Convention saying that if Alaska wanted the bridge they would pay for it themselves. Ken Dilanian, *Palin Backed ‘Bridge to Nowhere’ in 2006*, USA TODAY, Sept. 1, 2008, available at http://www.usatoday.com/news/politics/election2008/2008-08-31-palin-bridge_N.htm (quoting Sarah Palin) (“I told Congress, ‘Thanks, but no thanks,’ on that bridge to nowhere . . . If our state wanted a bridge,’ I said, ‘we’d build it ourselves.’”). The bridge was never built, but Alaska still received the funds with the bridge earmark removed. The Palin administration nevertheless followed through on construction of the “road to nowhere,” which is, with the exception of land access, completely useless. See Abbie Boudreau & Scott Bronstein, *The Bridge Failed, But the ‘Road to Nowhere’ Was Built*, CNNPOLITICS.COM, Sept. 24, 2008, <http://www.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/09/24/palin.road.to.nowhere/index.html#cnnSTCText>; Steve Quinn, *Alaska Town Opens ‘Road to Nowhere,’* USA TODAY, Sept. 20, 2008, http://www.usatoday.com/news/topstories/2008-09-20-2839100226_x.htm.

77. See Steve Berg, *Ready for Reinvestment? State Caught in Paradigm Shift*, MINNPOST, Dec. 16, 2008, http://www.minnpost.com/steveberg/2008/12/16/5306/ready_for_reinvestment_state_caught_in_paradigm_shift.

in rural areas as a “Cyberbridge to Nowhere.”⁷⁸ All implied that rural residents were “nobodies.”⁷⁹

While the battles for stimulus funds were often fought in state houses,⁸⁰ the turf was sometimes federal. One of the harshest statements about rural livelihoods came from former FCC commissioner Michael Katz in February 2009. Regarding the Obama Administration’s support for rural broadband infrastructure, Katz commented, “Other people don’t like to say bad things about rural areas . . . [s]o I will. . . . The notion that we should be helping people who live in rural areas avoid the costs that they impose on society . . . is misguided . . . from an efficiency point of view and an equity one.”⁸¹ Katz called rural places “environmentally hostile, energy inefficient and even weak in innovation, simply because rural people are spread out across the landscape.”⁸² Dee Davis of the

78. David M. Herszenhorn, *Internet Money in Fiscal Plan: Wise or Waste?*, N.Y. TIMES, Feb. 3, 2009, at A1, available at http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/03/us/politics/03broadband.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=cyber%20bridge%20to%20nowhere&st=cse.

79. I am reminded of Angela Harris’s discussion of “personhood” and how “economic practices and institutions converge” to “diminish the personhood of certain individuals and groups” leaving them vulnerable to oppression. Harris, *supra* note 22, at 51 (citing and discussing Iris Marion Young’s *Five Faces of Oppression*). While Harris offers this analysis in relation to gender and class, I believe it applies to the rural working class, whom the media and perhaps other “[s]ystems of subordination” have constructed as “deserving of less respect than others.” *Id.* at 52. Harris calls us to consider “the process by which this happens rather than only criticize the result.” *Id.*; see also WRAY, *supra* note 18, at 47, 50, 65–95 (discussing history of “white trash” and similar terms; dating the denigration of poor whites to the antebellum period when “a national preoccupation with rural people and rural life as backward and regressive, premodern and therefore unenlightened” emerged; and revealing that “white trash” and similar monikers, at times, described a status lower than blacks and Native Americans; those so labeled were at one time the object of a eugenics campaign).

80. See Michael Cooper & Griff Palmer, *Cities Lose Out on Road Funds from Federal Stimulus*, N.Y. TIMES, July 9, 2009, at A1, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/09/us/09projects.html?scp=1&sq=washington+stimulus+seattle+&st=nyt> (noting that “cities and their surrounding regions are getting far less than two-thirds of federal transportation stimulus money” even though “[t]wo-thirds of the country lives in large metropolitan areas” and quoting a senior fellow from the Brookings Institute’s Metropolitan Policy Institute for the proposition that “[t]he 100 largest metropolitan areas also contribute three-quarters of the nation’s economic activity . . .”); Berg, *supra* note 77 (noting that federal transportation funds “pass[] through state legislatures with formulas and restrictions that favor rural road projects over transit projects in metro areas” and arguing for a different system that favors metropolitan areas because they drive most states’ GDPs).

81. Howard Berkes, *Stimulus Stirs Debate Over Rural Broadband Access*, NPR, Feb. 16, 2009, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=100739283>. “The stimulus package includes \$7.2 billion to expand broadband Internet access into ‘underserved’ and rural areas.” *Id.* Berkes suggested that a better use of the funds would be to combat infant deaths. *Id.*; see also Ezra Klein, *Why we still need cities*, WASH. POST, Mar. 4, 2011, http://voices.washingtonpost.com/ezra-klein/2011/03/why_we_still_need_cities.html (expressing public resentment over the “raft of subsidies” going to rural America, including farm subsidies). *But see* Bill Bishop, *The Myth of Rural Subsidies*, DAILY YONDER, Mar. 10, 2011, <http://www.dailyyonder.com/not-thinking-about-rural-subsidies/2011/03/09/3221> (asserting that federal per capita spending is higher in urban places than in rural ones).

82. Berkes, *supra* note 81.

Center for Rural Strategies responded: “When people think of rural as ‘nowhere,’ [they’re] saying the people who live in those places aren’t worth working with, they’re not worth helping.”⁸³ I found myself thinking that public officials and the media would never make such comments about redevelopment and other initiatives aimed at assisting racial or ethnic minorities, or others in urban settings. I also found myself hoping that young people in rural America were not consumers of this commentary, lest their stereotype threat⁸⁴ be aggravated.

Then, in July 2009, Frank Rich launched an open-throated attack on rural voters, apparently provoked by Palin’s ongoing presence on the national stage. Rich wrote of “a dwindling white nonurban America that is aflame with grievances and awash in self-pity as the country hurtles into the 21st century and leaves it behind.”⁸⁵ Rich called these Americans a party of “resentment and victimization.”⁸⁶ He recognized the Republican Party’s denigration of its “base,” even as he further disparaged that base with a geographical metaphor, writing that “liberals and conservatives alike tend to ghettoize [the Republican base] as a rump backwater minority.”⁸⁷ I found Rich’s observation ironic in light of his own contributions to the group’s marginalization, but he is correct that many high-brow conservatives have articulated very unfavorable views of the GOP’s small-town constituency—and some also of Palin herself.⁸⁸

83. *Id.*

84. “Stereotype threat” occurs when “one recognizes that a negative stereotype about one’s group is applicable to oneself . . . that one could be judged or treated in terms of that stereotype, or that one could inadvertently do something that would confirm it.” Claude M. Steele, *Expert Report: Reports Submitted on Behalf of the University of Michigan: The Compelling Need for Diversity in Higher Education*, 5 MICH. J. RACE & L. 439, 445 (1999); see also Policar, *supra* note 64 (describing the self doubt and shame experienced by class migrants). I am suggesting, of course, that the rural-bashing is likely to contribute to a sense that rurality is a source of identity. See Michael M. Bell, *The Fruit of Difference: The Rural-Urban Continuum as a System of Identity*, 57 RURAL SOC. 65 (1992) (arguing that the rural-urban continuum is an important source of identity for “country” residents in the United Kingdom); Diane S. Berry, Gretchen M. Jones & Stan A. Kuczaj, *Differing States of Mind: Regional Affiliation, Personality Judgment, and Self-View*, 22 BASIC & APPLIED SOC. PSYCHOL. 43 (2000) (discussing place of origin as primary determinant of self-identity); David M. Hummon, *City Mouse, Country Mouse: The Persistence of Community Identity*, 9 QUALITATIVE SOC. 3 (1986) (discussing community identity).

85. See Rich, *supra* note 24; see also Berg, *supra* note 26 (characterizing “those left behind in small towns” as carrying “obnoxious” resentments).

86. Rich, *supra* note 24 (“Palin gives this movement a major party brand and political plausibility . . .”). Rich also wrote in this column, “The Palinst ‘real America’ is demographically doomed to keep shrinking. But the emotion it represents is disproportionately powerful for its numbers.” *Id.*

87. *Id.*; see also Berg, *supra* note 26 (suggesting both Democrats and Republicans are manipulating rural voters and that neither party takes rural interests seriously).

88. See, e.g., Ramesh Ponnuru, *Reform School: Sarah Palin and the Future of the GOP*, NAT’L REV., Nov. 17, 2008 (analyzing conservative commentary about Palin and her supporters; quoting Rush Limbaugh as referring to the “Wal-Mart class”; criticizing David Brooks and David Frum for

Meanwhile, Sarah Palin continues to provide a lightning rod for progressive elites. *New York Times* columnist Charles M. Blow proclaimed in a December 2010 column, *She Who Must Not Be Named*, that he would “no longer take part in the left’s obsessive-compulsive fascination” with Palin, which he labeled “unhealthy and counterproductive.”⁸⁹ Blow wrote:

[T]he left continues to elevate her every utterance so that they can mock and deride her. The problem is that this strategy continues to backfire. The more the left tries to paint her as one of the “Mean Girls,” the more the right sees her as “Erin Brockovich.” The never-ending attempts to tear her down only build her up

People on the left seem to need her, to bash her, because she is, in three words, the way the left likes to see the right: hollow, dim and mean.⁹⁰

But some were deaf to Blow’s call for a moratorium on Palin-bashing. Maureen Dowd apparently found Palin and her small-town minions irresistible, and in a column headlined *Pass the Caribou Stew*, published a few days after Blow’s, Dowd returned to the hunting and wildlife theme. Dowd ridiculed Palin merely for participating in a reality television show called *Sarah Palin’s Alaska*. The column took aim at Palin based on her status as a quasi-political figure, but in doing so, it gratuitously slammed hunting and fishing.⁹¹ Dowd wrote:

Sarah checked her freezer at home before she flew 600 miles to the Arctic, trying to justify her contention that she needs to hunt to eat. Wasn’t it already stocked with those halibuts she clubbed and gutted in an earlier show?

“My dad has taught me that if you want to have wild, organic, healthy food,” she pontificated, “you’re gonna go out there and hunt yourself and fish yourself and you’re gonna fill up your freezer.”

Does Palin really think the average housewife in Ohio who can’t pay her bills is going to load up on ammo, board two different planes, camp out for two nights with a film crew and shoot a caribou so she can feed her family organic food?⁹²

suggesting Palin and her supporters represent “anti-intellectualism”; and asserting that “[a]ny sensible politics includes an important role for elites”).

89. Charles M. Blow, *She Who Must Not Be Named*, N.Y. TIMES, Dec. 4, 2010, at A23, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/04/opinion/04blow.html?src=me&ref=general>.

90. *Id.*

91. Dowd, *supra* note 27.

92. *Id.*

A working-class family in middle America reading this will realize that Dowd is not only ignorant of them, she is deriding them. They know they don't have to fly to Alaska on two planes to go hunting.⁹³ Most just need to head out to the local deer woods to fill up their freezers, and many of them do just that every autumn.⁹⁴ They do it in good times, and they do it in lean times. While it is part sport, it is also part of how they provide for their families.⁹⁵ But in her haste to express scorn for Palin, Dowd not only challenges Palin's authenticity as a hunter, she also derides a practice common among rural Americans. Dowd appears entirely ignorant of this milieu, though elsewhere, ironically, she claims her own working-class roots and criticizes Obama for being elitist.⁹⁶

Meanwhile, Frank Rich has ridiculed Palin for suggesting that "white rural America actually still was the nation's baseline."⁹⁷ Certainly the number of rural Americans is diminishing, down to just about one-fifth of the population.⁹⁸ But the impact of voters who are rural within any number of states can make a difference not only in the Electoral College but also in Senate races and in the balance of power in the House of Representatives. Republicans and Tea Partiers have not overlooked these voters—and neither did Obama in the 2008 election cycle.⁹⁹ But while rural voters supported Barack Obama in record numbers compared to

93. Dowd further demonstrates her ignorance of hunting by failing to acknowledge that well-educated people—probably even some liberal elites and certainly many in the professional-managerial class—also hunt as a pastime. Where I come from, wealthy professionals travel to south and east Arkansas—and beyond—to engage in hunting ducks and other prey, while the less affluent working class tend to hunt locally for deer.

94. For the record, I have never been deer hunting, though my father went occasionally, and I did go fishing a few times as a teenager. My parents gave me a BB gun for my tenth birthday, but I only used it for target practice. Soon thereafter, I moved from my tomboy phase into my prissy phase. See Pruitt, *How You Gonna' Keep Her Down on the Farm . . .*, *supra* note 8.

95. Tamara Keith, *For Some Girls, The Ultimate Goal Is to Kill a Buck*, NPR, Dec. 9, 2010, available at <http://www.npr.org/2010/12/09/131390073/for-some-girls-the-ultimate-goal-is-to-kill-a-buck> (featuring 15-year-old Magan Hebert of Wayne County, Mississippi, who has been hunting since she was in fourth grade and just shot her first buck, and reporting that "[Hebert's] family gets almost all the red meat it needs for a whole year during hunting season"); see also SHERMAN, *supra* note 4, at 58, 61, 63 (describing the role of hunting as subsistence practice in the rural northern California community she studied).

96. See WILLIAMS, *supra* note 1, at 191 (citing Maureen Dowd, who says she grew up working class "in a house with a gun, a strong Catholic faith, an immigrant father, brothers with anti-illegal immigrant sentiments and a passion for bowling." Dowd "reminds us that Obama did not; that his mother 'got her Ph.D. in anthropology, studying the culture of Indonesia. . . . And as Obama has courted white, blue-collar voters in "Deer Hunter" and "Rocky" country, he has often appeared to be observing the odd habits of the colorful locals."').

97. Rich, *supra* note 24.

98. Lisa R. Pruitt, *The Forgotten Fifth: Rural Youth and Substance Abuse*, 20 STAN. L. & POL'Y REV. 359 (2009) (citing U.S. Census Bureau); Berg, *supra* note 26.

99. See Berg, *supra* note 26 (writing, "One group of big-city elites (Republican) is playing small-town voters as pawns against another group of big-city elites (Democrat)" and asserting that "what was once an authentic expression of populist anger now seems more like a tactical pose").

John Kerry and Al Gore, many have already swung back to supporting Republicans, who won big in both state and federal elections in 2010.¹⁰⁰ Of the 60 house seats that swung from Democrat to Republican in the 2010 mid-term election, two-thirds were among the nation's 125 most rural districts.¹⁰¹ Republicans captured 35 seats in congressional districts where the percentage of whites with bachelor's degrees is below the national average.¹⁰²

So, while progressives may regret and resent it—and while some deny it—cultivating the rural vote is not necessarily a waste of time. It may, in fact, be a key component of a winning strategy—especially in close elections. As one pundit observed in 2008, when it comes to politics, “Small towns aren't so small after all.”¹⁰³ Unfortunately, Republican gains in the 2010 mid-term elections may fuel progressives' ire at rural voters. Thus, even if those voters are once again seen to matter, they may not garner the sort of attention they deserve if Democrats pout instead of enlisting their support.

It's difficult to say who started the fight between progressives and the white working class, but the rural working class, in particular, have taken it on the chin in the context of recent political rhetoric, in part because they and Palin have claimed one another. I understand that pundits are looking for something interesting to say. They want to be clever and witty, and the white working class—especially those who are geographically or culturally rural—have proved irresistible fodder for them.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, rural Americans have become the butt of jokes in ways that would be entirely unacceptable for other racial, ethnic, religious, or sexual minorities.¹⁰⁵

100. Brooks, *supra* note 52. Brooks summarized the 2010 election outcome: “[Democrats] lost five House seats in Pennsylvania and another five in Ohio. They lost governorships in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin and Iowa. Republicans gained control of both state legislative houses in Ohio, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Indiana and Minnesota.” *Id.*

101. Bill Bishop & Julie Ardery, *Republicans Win Rural—and the House*, DAILY YONDER, (Nov. 4, 2010), <http://www.dailyonder.com/republicans-win-rural-%E2%80%94and-house/2010/11/03/3022>; see also *Election Results and Rural Policy*, CTR. FOR RURAL AFF. (Dec. 2010), available at <http://www.cfra.org/node/3109>.

102. Brooks, *supra* note 52.

103. Berg, *supra* note 26.

104. See BAGEANT, *supra* note 4, at 103 (“What white middle America loathes these days are poor and poorish people, especially the kind who look and sound like they just might live in a house trailer.”).

105. Williams suggests that they are the only group about whom it is socially acceptable to be so derisive. See WILLIAMS, *supra* note 1, at 154. I acknowledge that hateful speech directed at racial minorities—in particular blacks—is more problematic than that directed at whites because whites enjoy majority status and because of the particularly ugly history of slavery and its enduring legacy. See generally MARI J. MATSUDA, CHARLES R. LAWRENCE III, RICHARD DELGADO & KIMBERLE WILLIAMS CRENSHAW, *WORDS THAT WOUND* (1993) (analyzing differences between racially hateful speech directed at blacks and that directed at other racial and ethnic groups); Mahoney, *supra* note

Surely in the context of political discourse, the white working class deserve to be accorded the same dignity and respect we accord other groups. They have “culture” and “identity” too, and as liberals like to point out when it suits them, rural whites in particular are no longer a majority.¹⁰⁶ It’s time for (mostly metropolitan) progressives to take the high road and initiate a truce. But before I further discuss urban–rural détente, it is useful to explore nuances within the rural working class—nuances that help us better understand the class culture gap that is fueling the culture wars.

II. CLASS COMPLICATIONS IN RURAL AMERICA: THE WELL OFF, THE WORKERS, AND THE WHITE TRASH

Williams’s discussion of class takes place largely within the framework of just two groups—the professional-managerial class and what Williams labels the working class. The former are sometimes called the upper-middle class and include socially progressive elites, while the latter include those sometimes referred to as the Missing Middle.¹⁰⁷ While Williams discusses a number of bases for distinguishing among classes and admits that class is a slippery and multi-dimensional concept,¹⁰⁸ she uses education level as the primary basis of her classifica-

14, at 813 n.50 (citing Cheryl Harris, *Whiteness as Property*, 106 HARV. L. REV. 1707 (1993)) (discussing the reasons that “blackness is not the mirror image of whiteness: the reification of whiteness reflects centuries of privilege . . . [and] whiteness still exists as an artifact that confers advantages over blackness”). But I am not speaking here about a cause of action for racially hateful speech. I am talking about civility in public and private discourse. For a discussion of the history of the term “white trash” and its racialized connotations, see generally WRAY, *supra* note 18; see also LANI GUINIER & GERALD TORRES: *THE MINER’S CANARY: ENLISTING RACE, RESISTING POWER, TRANSFORMING DEMOCRACY* 94 (2003) (referring to rural whites as “raced black or brown” in the context of their exclusion from Texas’s flagship universities); WEBB, *supra* note 22, at 181 (explaining “redneck” as an ethnic slur).

106. The broader white working class, however, remain a majority, albeit one with unrealized power. See RUY TEIXEIRA & JOEL ROGERS, *AMERICA’S FORGOTTEN MAJORITY: WHY THE WHITE WORKING CLASS STILL MATTERS* (2000).

107. WILLIAMS, *supra* note 1, at 155–57 (crediting Theda Skocpol for coining the term Missing Middle). Williams uses the term “middle class” to refer to those who “have the basics and are neither poor nor rich. ‘Middle class’ is best understood as a symbol of arrival rather than a designation of a particular demographic group.” *Id.* at 156. Williams also uses the term “middle class” to refer to “the very broad group that sees itself as having achieved access to the core symbols of the settled life: a single family house, one car per adult, ownership of major household appliances, and some access to consumer goods—at a level defined by one’s friends and neighbors . . .” *Id.*; see also Carbone, *supra* note 22 (describing middle-class children as “those who start life without the wealth necessary to guarantee an easy future, but sufficient resources to secure a decent living through wise investment and productive work”).

108. WILLIAMS, *supra* note 1, at 155–57. Williams acknowledges that she is “describing cultural norms and centers of gravity, not rigid templates to which people conform in lockstep.” *Id.* at 156. I borrow the term “slippery” in relation to class from Beverly Skeggs. See BEVERLY SKEGGS, *CLASS, SELF, CULTURE* (2004); BEVERLY SKEGGS, *FORMATIONS OF CLASS AND GENDER:*

tion.¹⁰⁹ In particular, those with college degrees are typically in the professional-managerial class,¹¹⁰ while those with less education are categorized as working class.¹¹¹ If it takes a college degree to be in the professional-managerial class and fewer than 30% of Americans have such a

BECOMING RESPECTABLE (1997); *see also* Harris, *supra* note 22, at 38 (noting the “symbolic and material” consequences of class).

109. WILLIAMS, *supra* note 1, at 161 (following the lead of MICHÈLE LAMONT, *THE DIGNITY OF WORKING MEN: MORALITY AND THE BOUNDARIES OF RACE, CLASS, AND IMMIGRATION* 10 (2000) who asserts that, “working class is best defined negatively, in opposition to the poor and to professionals and managers who have completed college”); *see also id.* (arguing that “education—not income—needs to be the relevant proxy for class”; those who are poorly educated tend to be socially conservative much more than those with low incomes).

Joe Bageant offers an alternative definition of the working class—one pegged not to income or education, but to power. Nevertheless, he winds up articulating essentially the same class taxonomy as Williams. Like her, Bageant challenges the proposition that we are a middle-class nation, asserting, instead, that we are a working-class nation. BAGEANT, *supra* note 4, at 11. Bageant writes:

“Class,” however, is defined not in terms of income or degrees but in terms of power. Especially regarding labor. If you define “working class” in terms of power—bosses who have it and workers who don’t—at least 60 percent of America is working class, and the true middle class—the journalists, professionals and semiprofessionals, people in the management class, etc.—are not more than one-third at best. Leaving aside all numbers, “working class” might best be defined like this: You do not have power over your work. You do not control when you work, how much you get paid, how fast you work, or whether you will be cut loose from your job at the first shiver on Wall Street. “Working class” has not a thing to do with the color of your collar and not nearly as much to do with income as most people think, or in many cases even with whether you are self-employed. These days the working class consists of truck drivers, cashiers, electricians, medical technicians, and all sorts of people conditioned by our system *not* to think of themselves as working class. There are no clear lines, which is one reason why the delusion of a middle class majority persists.

Id. at 11–12. Elsewhere Bageant observes that the class war is now being waged between the educated and uneducated. *Id.* at 26. Like Bageant, Williams acknowledges the relevance of power to the lines between the classes. “People with less education often see professionals as exercising arrogant, unchecked power over their lives.” WILLIAMS, *supra* note 1, at 188. Williams’s list of working-class occupations is similarly expansive and also disputes the relevance of the white-collar/blue-collar divide. *Id.* at 155–56 (listing both those who sell auto parts and those who make them, nonunionized power plant workers, secretaries, hairdressers, receptionists, cashiers, and those in retail sales).

110. WILLIAMS, *supra* note 1, at 163 (“To get a professional-managerial job, for example, requires a degree at a four-year college—the more elite, the better—and often a graduate degree as well.”). Bageant refers to this group as “[o]verwhelmingly white and college educated” liberal elites who are “comfortably ensconced in the true middle class” and “liv[ing] among clones of themselves.” BAGEANT, *supra* note 4, at 13.

Williams acknowledges that terminology and definitions vary from class to class. She notes, for example, that those the upper-middle class typically refer to as the “working class” often see themselves as middle class. That group, in turn, tend to see the upper-middle class as “rich.” WILLIAMS, *supra* note 1, at 156.

111. WILLIAMS, *supra* note 1, at 161.

degree,¹¹² it is easy to conclude that we are, indeed, a nation of workers—or a working-class nation.¹¹³

Williams's embrace of the term Missing Middle as roughly synonymous with the working class suggests at least two things. First, those who like to think of themselves as middle class don't fit the label very well these days because they are in a much less stable fiscal situation than were the working-class folks in the post-World War II era; good jobs for those without higher education are harder to come by than they were just a generation or two ago.¹¹⁴ Thus, we arguably no longer have a middle class—at least not a very robust one or one with the financial stability and safety net previously suggested by the term.¹¹⁵ Second, Williams uses the term to make the point that academics and policy-makers have largely overlooked the middle class, focusing instead on poverty and the poor.¹¹⁶

As a member of the liberal elite who enjoyed an admittedly privileged upbringing,¹¹⁷ Williams acknowledges her awkwardness at discussing the working class. She refers to the “occupational hazard of writing about class”¹¹⁸ and likens it to similar hazards facing politicians who dare raise the issue.¹¹⁹ Yet I believe Williams describes the white working

112. *Id.* at 164.

113. See BAGEANT, *supra* note 4, at 11 (arguing that we have become a “working-class country” and that the “true middle class [are] the journalists, professionals and semiprofessionals, people in the management class, etc.”).

114. WILLIAMS, *supra* note 1, at 159.

115. A.O. Scott recently expressed the middle class as both all-encompassing and empty:

The idea of the universal middle class is a pervasive expression of American egalitarianism—and perhaps the only one left. In politics the middle has all but swallowed up the ends. Tax cuts aimed at the wealthy and social programs that largely benefit the poor must always be presented as, above all, good for the middle class, a group that thus seems to include nearly everyone. It is also a group that is, at least judging from the political rhetoric of the last 20 years, perennially in trouble: shrinking, forgotten, frustrated, afraid of falling down and scrambling to keep up.

A.O. Scott, *Hollywood's Class Warfare*, N.Y. TIMES, Dec. 22, 2010, at AR1, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/26/movies/26scott.html?scp=2&sq=winter%27s%20bone&st=cse>.

116. WILLIAMS, *supra* note 1, at 160–61.

117. *Id.* at 189.

118. *Id.* at 275 n.20.

119. *Id.* at 191. Williams writes, “A presidential candidate should never get into a situation of explaining the less privileged to the elite. The risks of sounding condescending are just too large.” *Id.* Bageant observes that politicians are disciplined anytime they hint at the presence of classes. “America, as we are so often told, is a classless society. And without classes there can never be a class war (which does not prevent any politician who mentions class being accused of fomenting one).” BAGEANT, *supra* note 4, at 101. A recent example of this phenomenon occurred during bipartisan negotiations over whether to extend Bush-era tax cuts. Particularly controversial was whether these tax cuts should be extended for earners in the highest income bracket. David Dreier, a Republican of California, expressed amazement “that the Democrats were continuing the same tactics they’d used before they were buried by a landslide in November’s House elections.” Andrea Seabrook, *Negotiators Seek Tax Deal as House Passes Bill*, NPR, Dec. 2, 2010, available at

class with remarkable sensitivity and compassion.¹²⁰ Williams's descriptions of these two broad classes resonate with me as a class migrant,¹²¹ as one with a foot in both camps. I can see myself in both classes, and I can attest to the class conflict within.

Broadly speaking, I believe Williams's class taxonomy is accurate and helpful, particularly as class relates to political coalition building, which is the primary use she makes of it. But Williams's broad binary overlooks some of the class nuance associated with rural and small-town America, nuance that may help us understand the class culture gap between the socially progressive and the supremely enigmatic white non-metropolitan voter. Nevertheless, another aspect of the class taxonomy that Williams articulates can help us understand rural white voters.

Specifically, within the category "working class," Williams recognizes a divide between the "settled working class" and the "hard living."¹²² While the settled working class value stability and routine, order and abundance,¹²³ the hard living "tend toward drugs or heavy drinking, marital instability, and flightiness."¹²⁴ Thus the settled working class are roughly synonymous with our vision of what the middle class are or should be, while the hard living segment may not be. Rather, this latter group spill over into what many would label "working poor."¹²⁵ Under-

<http://www.npr.org/2010/12/02/131761855/Negotiators-Seek-Tax-Deal-As-House-Passes-Bill>.

Dreier stated, "The standard old class warfare, us versus them, rich versus poor. And I think that all we need to do is look at the November 2nd election. There was a rejection of this divisive tone which we regularly hear around here—the haves and the have-nots." *Id.*

120. Bageant, too, writes with extraordinary sensitivity, a feat made easier by his status as a class migrant who sees himself as writing about "his people." Bageant and Williams's style is in sharp contrast to Thomas Frank whose narrative is unrelenting in ridiculing white, working-class middle America.

121. See *supra* note 109 and accompanying text.

122. WILLIAMS, *supra* note 1, at 164–66.

123. *Id.* at 164–65.

124. *Id.* at 165.

125. Williams does not use the label "working poor" in this way; she acknowledges the term, as defined by Dennis Gilbert, as those whose median income is \$12,000. *Id.* at 155 (citing DENNIS GILBERT, *THE AMERICAN CLASS STRUCTURE IN AN AGE OF GROWING INEQUALITY* 270 (6th ed. 2003)). Bageant has this to say about the "working-poor whites":

Admittedly, my people are a little seedier than most; this is after all the South, albeit the northernmost point of the South. But their needs—affordable healthcare, a living wage, steady employment, affordable rents, and having some money for retirement—differ from those of all working-class Americans only in degree. There is no sharp dividing line between the working-poor renters in this neighborhood and the working-class homeowners in the treeless T-board-sided modular home suburbs here and everywhere else. The working class here in what they are now calling the "heartland" (all the stuff between the big cities) exists on a continuum ranging from complete insecurity to the not-quite-complete insecurity of having a decent but endangered job. It is a continuum extending from the apathy of the poorest to the hard-edged anger of those with more to lose. Which ain't a lot, brother, when your household income hovers around \$30,000 or 35,000 with both people working. Many are working poor but kid themselves that they are middle

standing the class culture wars, then, requires us to see at least three classes: the professional-managerial class, the settled working class as an intermediate group, and the hard living.

This divide within the broader white working class is significant because it helps explain these voters' attachment to morality and cultural issues. As Williams expresses it:

Understanding the settled working class is impossible without an appreciation of the specter of hard living. This specter is what anchors working-class culture to stability instead of novelty, to self-regulation instead of self-actualization. The specter of hard living also shapes the moral vision of American workers in ways that fuel culture wars.¹²⁶

The settled working class fear tumbling down to the next rung of the class ladder; they fear becoming hard living—or being perceived as such.¹²⁷ This fear, along with an attendant desire to distinguish themselves from the hard living—something they cannot do, for example, on the basis of color—influences their politics. Specifically, it leads them to focus on work and to see themselves as self-made, self-sufficient, and independent from government.¹²⁸ Work, Williams writes, “signals a form of moral purity.”¹²⁹ Work saves. Williams further notes that both blacks and whites within the working class define success more in terms of mo-

class—partly out of pride and partly because of the long-running national lie that most Americans are middle class.

BAGEANT, *supra* note 4, at 5.

126. WILLIAMS, *supra* note 1, at 165–66.

127. *Id.* at 164.

128. See BAGEANT, *supra* note 4, at 66–67 (discussing working class voters' rejection of “entitlements” such as unemployment compensation, food stamps, or HeadStart, and their tendency to believe they have never benefitted from government spending); *id.* at 8 (“If you had lived his hard working life and had a philosophy of never wanting any handout from the government, you too would be conservative. By ‘conservative,’ I do not mean a wild-eye neocon. I mean that you would be cautious and traditional enough to vote for the man who looks strong enough to keep housing values up, to destroy your unseen enemies abroad, and to give God a voice in national affairs.”); *id.* at 29–30 (“Most working people around here believe in the buzz phrase ‘personal responsibility.’ Their daddies and mamas taught them to accept responsibility for their actions. They assume responsibility for their lives and don’t want a handout from the government. They see accepting public help as a sign of failure and moral weakness. Consequently, they don’t like social spending to give people a lift. But self-reliant as they are, what real chance do they have living on wages that do not allow them to accumulate savings? What chance do they have living from paycheck to paycheck, praying there will be no layoffs at J.C. Penney or Toll Brothers Homes or Home Depot?”); see also WEBB, *supra* note 22, at 161, 180, 182, 289 (discussing the fiercely independent history of the Scots-Irish, from whom many white working-class folks, especially those in the rural South, are descendants).

129. WILLIAMS, *supra* note 1, at 178 (quoting LAMONT, *supra* note 109, at 24).

rality than in terms of socioeconomic achievement.¹³⁰ I contend that they arguably have little choice, given that the latter is so much farther from their reach.

Race is relevant to all of this in several ways, one partly captured by Joe Bageant: “[T]he myth of the power of white skin endures, and so does the unspoken belief that if a white person does not succeed, his or her lack of success can be due only to laziness.”¹³¹ The settled working class attribute the failures of the hard living to laziness. But the professional-managerial class are also influenced by this white skin myth, for

130. *Id.* at 157 (citing LAMONT, *supra* note 109, at 10); see also SHERMAN, *supra* note 4, at 9 (noting that “the poor may focus on the moral value of hard work, but perhaps see it as divorced somewhat from economic rewards”).

131. BAGEANT, *supra* note 4, at 9. The “myth of the power of white skin” might be seen as a downside to liberal elites’ acknowledgement of their white privilege. That is, if white social progressives fail to see the limits of white privilege for those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged, they may see white skin as having more significant material benefit than it does. Indeed, at least one item on Peggy McIntosh’s list of white privilege indicators has always struck me as profoundly incorrect: “If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area, which I can afford and in which I would want to live.” Peggy McIntosh, *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*, N.Y. MODEL FOR BATTERER PROGRAM (1988), available at <http://www.nymbp.org/reference/WhitePrivilege.pdf>. In fact, many working-class whites cannot afford to live where they want, and they may not like where they are forced to live. Recall that “trailer trash” is generally synonymous with “white trash.” See WILLIAMS, *supra* note 1, at 154; see also, e.g., Katherine MacTavish, Michelle Eley, & Sonya Salamon, *Housing Vulnerability Among Rural Trailer-Park Households*, 13 GEO. J. POVERTY L. & POL’Y 95, 95 (2006) (noting that in the 1990s, “the number of manufactured homes in nonmetro places grew by 25% to represent 16% of all owner-occupied rural housing stock”). In any event, I doubt Peggy McIntosh grew up working class or, worse yet, poor. White privilege is powerful indeed, but it does not mean that all white people have easier lives than all people of color. White privilege certainly doesn’t mean that white workers have an easy life. They are struggling against many of the same barriers to socioeconomic success that hinder racial and ethnic minorities. Understanding and acknowledging the limits of white privilege—which may be particularly anemic in all-white, socioeconomically disadvantaged communities—would facilitate awareness of the structural and cultural obstacles that keep the white working class socially and economically immobile. See Lisa R. Pruitt, “*Winter’s Bone*” and the Limits of White Privilege (Part I), SALT LAW BLOG, (Aug. 17, 2010), <http://www.saltlaw.org/blog/2010/08/17/winters-bone-and-the-limits-of-white-privilege/>; Lisa R. Pruitt, “*Winter’s Bone*” and the Limits of White Privilege (Part II), SALT LAW BLOG, (Aug. 26, 2010), <http://www.saltlaw.org/blog/2010/08/26/winters-bone-and-the-limits-of-white-privilege-part-ii/>. For further discussion of the role of white privilege and male privilege in the work-family debate, see Robert S. Chang, *Joan Williams, Coalitions, and Getting Beyond the Wages of Whiteness and the Wages of Maleness*, 34 SEATTLE U. L. REV. 825 (2011).

Of course, race is relevant in other ways, too. As bell hooks expresses it:

Racial solidarity, particularly the solidarity of whiteness, has historically always been used to obscure class, to make the white poor see their interests as one with the world of white privilege. Similarly, the black poor have always been told that class can never matter as much as race.

HOOKS, *supra* note 22, at 5. She goes on to assert, “Nowadays the black and white poor know better. They are not so easily duped by an appeal to unquestioned racial identification and solidarity, but they are still uncertain about what all of the changes mean” *Id.* at 5–6. I hope she is right about the “knowing better” part.

they tend to see the white working class as lazy—and dumb.¹³² While the professional-managerial class can distinguish themselves by education, income, and various associated cultural trappings,¹³³ these—like race—are not available as sources of distinction among working-class whites, who must find other grounds for setting themselves apart from whites one rung down the class ladder. For the settled working class, that basis is often morality—and it is a morality grounded significantly in work. Each group thus differentiates itself from the group beneath. The broader class culture wars between the professional-managerial class and the working class are thus being fueled by a second class war—a war *within* the working class. But the professional-managerial class are oblivious to this secondary class war and thus fail to grasp why moral and associated cultural issues are so important to the working class.

Rural Americans would probably recognize those whom Williams describes as the settled working class and the hard living, but they might assign them different labels. First, reflecting the hard times associated with most rural and nonmetropolitan economies,¹³⁴ rural workers might

132. See WILLIAMS, *supra* note 1, at 154 (citing studies showing that the professional-managerial class link the white working class to laziness); SHERMAN, *supra* note 4, at 185–86 (observing the irony that many see the poor as lacking work ethic and as “lazy, deviant, oppositional, and dependent”).

133. Recall Williams’s discussion of “understated clothes, educational travel, and our teeny tiny portions of food . . .” WILLIAMS, *supra* note 1, at 212. Angela Harris similarly observes the significance of symbolic markers of taste to class distinctions, noting that taste “has a lot to do with consumption.” Harris, *supra* note 22, at 41; see also BAGEANT, *supra* note 4, at 115 (describing “buying and squirreling away more meaningless junk”); HOOKS, *supra* note 22, at 6 (writing that “[c]onsumer culture silences working people and the middle classes” who are “busy buying or planning to buy”).

134. The rural poverty rate consistently exceeds the urban poverty rate. The most recent poverty statistics released by the U.S. government, for 2009, indicate a 16.6% poverty rate for nonmetro residents and a 13.9% rate for their metro counterparts. *Rural Income, Poverty and Welfare: Poverty Geography*, U.S. DEP’T OF AGRIC. ECON. RESEARCH SERV. (Oct. 6, 2010), <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/IncomePovertyWelfare/PovertyGeography.htm>. In addition, of 386 persistent poverty counties (those with poverty rates in excess of 20% in each of the last four decennial censuses), 340 counties are nonmetropolitan, constituting 13% of all micropolitan counties and 18% of all other nonmetropolitan counties. Only 4% of metropolitan counties are designated persistent poverty counties. *Id.* The vast majority of persistent poverty counties (280) are in the South. *Id.*

Further, median earnings are lower in rural places than in urban places. The median earnings for the rural population twenty-five years of age and older is \$32,711, while the median earnings for their urban counterparts is \$34,624. *American FactFinder, Educational Attainment, 2005–2009 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates*, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, <http://factfinder.census.gov> (search “S1501”). According to a 2008 report of the Carsey Institute, the annual earnings gap between rural and urban families has widened in the past forty years. In 1969 the earnings gap between married couples was \$13,000, whereas by 2006 it had risen to \$19,000. KRISTIN SMITH, CARSEY INST., *WORKING HARD FOR THE MONEY: TRENDS IN WOMEN’S EMPLOYMENT 1970 TO 2007*, at 3 (2008), available at <http://carseyinstitute.unh.edu/publications/Report-Smith-WorkingHard.pdf>. Finally, the education gap between rural and urban populations has widened dramatically in recent

be more likely to acknowledge their status as working class than to identify with the broad middle class.¹³⁵ Williams observes that “academics often confuse the ‘working class’ with low-income Americans,”¹³⁶ but in nonmetropolitan America, the working class *are* “low-income” Americans—at least by my estimation of what constitutes a low income.¹³⁷ Many rural Americans who work are, in fact, working poor.¹³⁸

Second, rural Americans would more likely embrace the dichotomy expressed in the title of Jennifer Sherman’s book, *Those Who Work, Those Who Don’t: Poverty, Morality, and Family in Rural America*. Sherman’s 2009 book presents an ethnography of a white working-class town—an ethnography like those that Williams uses to make her points about the class culture wars. But Sherman’s ethnography is different in that it provides a distinctly rural perspective on the class war raging *within* the broad working class. Within rural communities, the closest analogue to the settled working class in Williams’s dichotomy are “those who work,” even if some in the category don’t work as regularly or in jobs as secure as those enjoyed by Williams’s settled working class.¹³⁹ These workers distinguish themselves from those who don’t work or who work even less regularly, who are roughly analogous to the hard living in Williams’s taxonomy. As with the efforts of the settled working class to differentiate themselves from the hard living, morality is key for those who

years. See generally PATRICK J. CARR & MARIA J. KEFALAS, HOLLOWING OUT THE MIDDLE: THE RURAL BRAIN DRAIN AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR AMERICA (2009); BISHOP, *supra* note 6, at 131–32.

135. But see BAGEANT, *supra* note 4, at 15 (writing of those “whose kids’ high school trip is to Iraq, who are two paydays away from homelessness yet in their pride cling to the notion that they are middle-class Americans”).

136. WILLIAMS, *supra* note 1, at 156.

137. Joe Bageant offers this description of those I see as the nonmetropolitan equivalent of Williams’s settled working class:

Calling them poor would not be quite accurate, unless you used net worth as a gauge of prosperity. Then they would be worse than poor because poor is zero, and owing hundreds of thousands with no chance of ever paying it off is below the zero mark. But debt and poverty have no relationship in the American scheme of things, so let’s just call [these people] “poorish”—outwardly comfortable people who could be homeless next month.

BAGEANT, *supra* note 4, at 103. He elsewhere points out that liberal elites, when they recognize members of this class at all, tend not to see that they are struggling. *Id.* at 7.

138. See SMITH, *supra* note 134, at 18–19. But see Sabrina Tavernise, *Ohio Town Sees Public Job as Only Route to Middle Class*, N.Y. TIMES, March 15, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/16/us/16ohio.html?_r=1&hpw (featuring a nonmetropolitan, working-class couple who together earned \$63,000 per year working as a janitor and a sewer manager in the public sector). Of the working poor, Bageant writes, “Poor is poor, whether you have to work for your poverty or not.” BAGEANT, *supra* note 4, at 9 (suggesting that the “distinction between poor and working poor may well be a meaningless moral distinction shaped by the Protestant work ethic”).

139. See SHERMAN, *supra* note 4, at 97–98.

work, and they often cast their moral superiority as grounded in their work ethic.¹⁴⁰

Observing that “[m]oral discourses focused around work ethics are generally the most powerful” among various moral discourses,¹⁴¹ Sherman notes that moral ideas such as those associated with work “frequently become most important when other status markers are unattainable or unusable.”¹⁴² This is particularly relevant to rural communities that are largely racially and ethnically homogeneous or where few other status markers are available or evident. Sherman expands on the significance of homogeneity, explaining that when “combined with other cultural norms or social needs that encourage it, [homogeneity] can cause morality to develop a crucial role in the social life of many different types of American communities.”¹⁴³ Sherman illustrates the point by reference to “Golden Valley,” the northern California community she studied:

In this context economic distinctions are fading in importance, as so few people have access to jobs that pay well or have any real security. Ethnic or racial distinctions are also scarce; being white, in and of itself, goes only so far as a form of distinction in Golden Valley, since most everyone there is white. Similarly, given its cultural homogeneity and almost complete lack of access to high culture markers, culture also provides little by way of social distinction between community members and serves rather as a source of cohesion. As poor rural whites in a community of poor rural whites, they are limited in their sources of distinction. But like people in all societies, they still desire to organize themselves into social groups and some sort of hierarchy. Morality is one of the few remaining axes upon which to base this hierarchy. When jobs, incomes, and other sources

140. *See id.* at 4–5 (calling morality “more than a set of values based on culturally shared beliefs; it is a force that actively structures social life and the social hierarchy of the community”); *id.* at 7–8 (quoting ANDREW SAYER, *THE MORAL SIGNIFICANCE OF CLASS* 167 (2005)) (discussing morality as not necessarily grounded in religion but “as grounded in the social psychology of emotional responses as evaluative judgments”); *see also* BAGEANT, *supra* note 4, at 75 (discussing how those who had factory jobs when they represented more secure, regular work now judge those who “drift from job to job” as “dregs”). Others have observed the significance of work and morality in rural communities in other nations. *See, e.g.*, Pini et al., *supra* note 42, at 23–24 (suggesting a distinction between those who work and those who don’t).

141. SHERMAN, *supra* note 4, at 8.

142. *Id.* at 6. (“As a nation, we seldom acknowledge the degree to which our culture is built upon an extremely moralistic set of doctrines, particularly the belief in the moral value of hard work and the doctrine of individual achievement. Such ideas as the individual’s personal and moral responsibility for his or her own success or failure permeate our culture and our worldview.”).

143. *Id.* at 7.

of identity are stripped away, it is still possible to find ways to define themselves . . . as morally upstanding.¹⁴⁴

Homogeneity in rural communities is often heightened by the stasis and attachment to place that tend to characterize rural places.¹⁴⁵

Like Williams and Sherman, Joe Bageant identifies work as a key source of morality for the white working class, but he expresses the situation in rather more blunt terms, invoking the difference between what he calls the “American redneck” and “white trash.”¹⁴⁶ Bageant summarizes:

Life is about work for the American redneck. . . . For all these people work is an obsession and has been for generations stretching back to the textile mills, the homesteads of the West and Midwest, the immigrant labor mines of West Virginia and Colorado and Montana, the subsistence farms of the South. The forebears of today’s rednecks were people for whom not working meant their families would starve. Literally. So the work ethic is burned into their genetic code. (Incidentally, I am not talking about white trash here. I am talking about rednecks, the difference being that rednecks work themselves to death and will never accept a handout. White trash folks do not have the same hang-up.) In the redneck mind, lazy is the worst thing a person can be—worse than dumb, drunk or mean, worse than being a liar and a jailbird or crazy. The absolute worst thing that a redneck can say about anyone is: “He doesn’t want to work”¹⁴⁷

Similarly, Sherman notes that within Golden Valley, work as a marker of morality was so important that failure to work was considered tanta-

144. *Id.* at 6; *see also id.* at 5 (discussing the constant process by which humans differentiate themselves from one another; noting the universality of the “need to consolidate a sense of self through the creation of social boundaries”).

145. Pruitt, *supra* note 5, at 353–56.

146. BAGEANT, *supra* note 4, at 69–70; *see also* SHERMAN, *supra* note 4, at 4.

147. BAGEANT, *supra* note 4, at 69–70. I cannot resist sharing my mother’s frequent comment about individuals in our community who did not meet her high standards for work ethic, “He’s too lazy to eat all he wants.”

Williams also refers to white trash and suggests that it may be synonymous with hard living. WILLIAMS, *supra* note 1, at 165 (citing MARIA KEFALAS, *WORKING CLASS HEROES: PROTECTING HOME, COMMUNITY, AND NATION IN A CHICAGO NEIGHBORHOOD* 21 (2003)). In addition, Williams quotes those who have used the term in relation to the broader working class. *Id.* at 154 (citing MICHAEL ZWEIG, *WHAT’S CLASS GOT TO DO WITH IT?: AMERICAN SOCIETY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY* 166 (2004)) (discussing, in the education setting, how professors see working-class whites); *see also id.* at 188 (regarding working-class attitudes toward professionals). These examples suggest that working-class people believe liberal elites and social progressives view them very negatively, as white trash. These uses of such a clearly pejorative term suggest that working-class folks perceive liberal elites as unaware of the difference between those who work and those who don’t, between the settled working class and the hard living. In sum, the working class believe that the professional-managerial class do not understand how hardworking the working class are.

mount to drug use and alcoholism as manifestations of moral turpitude.¹⁴⁸ Indeed, in the rural context, Sherman observed a hierarchy among forms of government assistance: unemployment benefits and disability assistance were viewed with less obloquy than welfare benefits because the former are linked to past work and therefore a “symbolic work ethic.”¹⁴⁹

Interestingly, President Obama has shown a striking awareness of class as it plays out in racially homogeneous, small towns. In his 1995 autobiography, *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance*, Obama described the Kansas towns where his maternal grandparents grew up. Referring to their stories as the basis of his musing, Obama wrote:

[Y]ou had to listen carefully to recognize the subtle hierarchies and unspoken codes that had policed their early lives, the distinctions of people who don't have a lot and live in the middle of nowhere. It had to do with something called respectability—there were respectable people and not-so-respectable people—and although you didn't have to be rich to be respectable, you sure had to work harder at it if you weren't.¹⁵⁰

Obama's attention to subtle hierarchies based on respectability in small-town, middle America is similar to what Sherman, Williams, and Bageant all observe: When few bases exist for differentiating among outwardly homogeneous groups—in this case, white workers in an all-white community—people cling to subtle differences, to “symbolic boundaries.”¹⁵¹

Thus in both the broader (but perhaps implicitly urban) context that Williams describes and in the rural milieu that is the subject of Sherman's study and implicitly of Bageant's book, work is a badge of virtue. In both contexts, a group or class whose economic status is frighteningly precarious (whether we call them the settled working class, those who work, or rednecks) essentially salve an unacknowledged wound by vigo-

148. SHERMAN, *supra* note 4, at 83–96, 120–26.

149. *Id.* at 70, 68–71 (also noting the ways in which these different categories of benefits are constructed as masculine and feminine).

150. OBAMA, *supra* note 64, at 13. Obama also noted the historical context in which he wrote, describing it as “a time when hardship, the great leveler that had brought people closer together, was shared by all.” *Id.*; see also Edward R. Morris, *The “Hidden Injuries” of Class and Gender among Rural Teenagers*, in *RESHAPING GENDER & CLASS IN RURAL SPACES* (Barbara Pini & Belinda Leach eds., forthcoming 2011) (telling the story of Kaycee, a rural teenage girl whose family had a bad reputation, working hard to rise above her family's lack of respectability).

151. SHERMAN, *supra* note 4, at 9. Pierre Bourdieu makes the same point: “Social identity lies in difference, and difference is asserted against what is closest, which represents the greatest threat.” PIERRE BOURDIEU, *DISTINCTION: A SOCIAL CRITIQUE OF THE JUDGEMENT OF TASTE* 479 (Richard Nice trans., 1984) (1979).

rously distinguishing themselves from a group who are even worse off (whether we call them the hard living, those who don't work, or white trash). When it comes to status and well-being, I can only revert to cliché: it's all relative. Or, to quote the colloquial Bageant, "[H]uman nature being what it is, we are all kicking someone else's dog around, whether we admit it or not."¹⁵² Ironically, progressives' eye-rolling at the white working class only enhances the desire of this intermediate class to claim for themselves middle-class status, to differentiate themselves from the hard living, barely working, and others this class see as the true *hoi polloi*.

Moreover, while liberal elites muster sympathy for racial and ethnic minorities and sometimes for poor whites, they look past the struggles of the working class.¹⁵³ They hold immigrants up as models of industry—and rightfully so—even as they fail to acknowledge the industry and resourcefulness of the white working class.¹⁵⁴ As Williams writes, social progressives tend to promote programs to assist have-nots, even as they look past the have-a-littles.¹⁵⁵ For the work-identified intermediate class, nothing could be more infuriating.

Just as the professional-managerial class fail to see the working class accurately, most urban liberal elites fail to see rural workers beyond the caricature of the God-fearing deer hunter suggested by the title of Joe Bageant's book. We have become such an urban nation, not only in sheer numbers but also in terms of a metro-normative perspective, that we

152. BAGEANT, *supra* note 4, at 103.

153. I am reminded of this line from President Obama's famous "race speech" of March 18, 2008: "Most working- and middle-class white Americans don't feel that they have been particularly privileged by their race. Their experience is the immigrant experience—as far as they're concerned, no one handed them anything. They built it from scratch. They've worked hard all their lives . . ." President Barack Obama, A More Perfect Union (Mar. 18, 2008) (transcript available at <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=88478467>). Of course, these citizens have received the benefit of government programs from the taxes they have paid, though they may not see this. BAGEANT, *supra* note 4, at 67 (referring to a man who "thinks he has never benefited from the commonweal because he has never been on welfare"); *id.* at 72 (observing how upsetting predictions of the impending death of Social Security are for the working class, though they would "never admit it openly because, well, it's a handout. An entitlement.").

Whites have also—to greatly varying degrees—been the beneficiaries of white privilege. *See, e.g.,* Harris, *supra* note 105, at 1709; Mahoney, *supra* note 14, at 811, 813.

154. Interestingly, Bageant asserts that Anglo workers do not appear to be resentful of the Latino/a laborers with whom they compete in some ways for jobs. BAGEANT, *supra* note 4, at 58; *see also* Lisa R. Pruitt, *Latina/os, Locality, and Law in the Rural South*, 12 HARV. LATINO L. REV. 135, 149–50 (2009) (discussing the movie *Morristown: In the Air and Sun*, which depicts Latinos and Anglos cooperating to unionize a poultry processing plant in Tennessee).

155. *See* WILLIAMS, *supra* note 1, at 207. Joe Bageant similarly observes that liberal elites do not recognize the struggles of the working class when they see them. BAGEANT, *supra* note 4, at 7 ("When the middle-class citizens of Winchester or of the new suburbs of America—the 20 percent or so of Americans whose lives most closely resemble media images of the middle class—do cross paths with these struggling workers, they do not often recognize them as struggling.").

don't see—indeed, it seems we sometimes refuse to see—America's rural forgotten fifth and how many of them live. Fewer and fewer of us have lived rural lives or had significant rural experiences.¹⁵⁶ For rural Americans, then, spatial distance aggravates the social distance that relegates the entire working class to the peripheral vision of policy-makers and reform-minded elites.¹⁵⁷

This brings us, finally, to the nonmetropolitan analogue to Williams's professional-managerial class, which I will simply call “well off.” First, few, if any, liberal elites live in most rural communities, excepting those that are college towns or are undergoing rural gentrification.¹⁵⁸ When members of the professional-managerial class are present in nonmetropolitan communities, they are unlikely to be socially progressive.¹⁵⁹ Some will be locally grown professionals who are culturally very much like their families of origin, in spite of their access to higher education. Others will be local entrepreneurs¹⁶⁰ who, whether educated or not, are likely to have a small-business, anti-government mentality.¹⁶¹

156. RURAL SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE, at xv (Nancy Lohmann & Roger A. Lohmann eds., 2005) (tracking the transition of the United States from rural to urban); *see also* Silver, *supra* note 48; Pruitt, *Rural Rhetoric*, *supra* note 8, at 164–65 (observing that the only rural America many now know is what they see as they drive between cities).

157. This is somewhat ironic since so many social progressives wear their own middle-class backgrounds as badges of virtue, suggesting that they understand class boundaries because they have transcended them in some measure. *See* Dowd, *supra* note 96; Friedman, *supra* note 33; Frank Rich, Op-Ed., *White Like Me*, N.Y. TIMES, Jan. 17, 2009, at WK14, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/18/opinion/18rich.html?scp=11&sq=school+op-ed+election&st=nyt>. The difference, of course, may be that when these baby boomers were growing up middle class in different parts of the country (all urban, I might add), being middle class was a much more secure place to be than it is now. WILLIAMS, *supra* note 1, at 159 (discussing diminishing affluence and stability of the middle class over time). For further discussion of the growing income gap between classes and economic instability of the middle class, particularly in relation to the work-family debate, *see* Kessler, *supra* note 9, at 699–700.

158. *See* sources cited *supra* note 5, especially HAMILTON ET AL.; *see also* NINA GLASGOW & DAVID L. BROWN, GREY GOLD: DO OLDER IN-MIGRANTS BENEFIT RURAL COMMUNITIES?, CARSEY INST. (Fall 2008), available at <http://www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu/publications/PB-Glasgow-Brown-GreyGold.pdf>.

159. *See* Morris, *supra* note 150 (disputing the myth of rural classlessness).

160. BAGEANT, *supra* note 4, at 42 (citing the example of real estate agents and developers); *id.* at 72 (noting that workers express disdain for “weirdo university professors, union racketeers, and the rich California ACLU types. People who never worked for a living” and blame them for the changed economic landscape for American workers). As several commentators have observed, the working class tend to admire entrepreneurs such as small business owners, even as they resent the well-educated. *See* Brooks, *supra* note 52, at 1 (writing of workers in the Midwest that “disdain Wall Street but admire capitalism”).

161. BAGEANT, *supra* note 4, at 28–29 (referring to “a local network of moneyed families, bankers, developers, lawyers, and businesspeople” who do not invest in quality of life except for their own; asserting that these “Main Street pickle vendors” are a “business cartel” who support “low taxes, few or no local regulations, no unions” and who control “most elected offices and municipal boards”).

In short, the upper crust in rural communities may be more affluent than their fellow townspeople—and sometimes also more educated—but they do not necessarily have socially and economically progressive views. Nonmetropolitan workers thus view these local elites principally in terms of their (relative) wealth, tending to admire and envy them while not clashing with them politically.¹⁶²

What we have in nonmetropolitan communities, then, are essentially three classes. A few people are well off, many are workers, and some are considered white trash—a category defined primarily by failure to work or perceived laziness. Each class judges the next class down, seeking bases for differentiation. But a broader geographic dynamic is also increasingly in play—one whereby the urban disdain the rural. As I discuss in Part IV, greater familiarity between the professional-managerial and working classes, as well as between rural and urban, may be a necessary initial step toward a more robust and diverse coalition for progressive change.

III. POLITICS, POLICY, AND WORK-FAMILY STRUGGLES IN RURAL AMERICA

It is no coincidence that the working class are often associated with small towns and rural places. In fact, many of the very voters who most puzzle socially progressive law and policy-makers do live in nonmetropolitan America. Enigmatic and uncouth as these voters often seem to liberal elites, they do pay taxes (on their typically paltry incomes and low-value land holdings), and they have needs as working families and, more generally, as citizens. Just as Williams calls us to reach out to the broader working class, we should reach out to rural voters and invite them into a broader and more progressive political coalition. We should do so not only for the benefit of the greater, collective good, but also in order to better address the particular needs of rural and small-town workers, their families, and their communities.

Rural families are arguably the very quintessence of Williams's composite portrait of working-class families, not a great surprise given that most rural families are working class. Williams notes, for example, working-class families' reliance on and preference for personal networks to provide child care,¹⁶³ as well as their closer social and spatial links to

162. *Id.*; see also generally DAVID CAY JOHNSTON, PERFECTLY LEGAL: THE COVERT CAMPAIGN TO RIG OUR TAX SYSTEM TO BENEFIT THE SUPER RICH—AND CHEAT EVERYBODY ELSE (2003) (discussing how the working class tend to follow the political lead of local elites).

163. WILLIAMS, *supra* note 1, at 207 (noting that many can only afford inexpensive franchised centers and moreover experience anxiety about “strangers” taking care of their children, leading to a negative opinion of the “McCenters”; expressing a preference for neighbors to watch their children,

family.¹⁶⁴ Williams also observes that “elites are more likely than workers to hire help versus turning to family or neighbors.”¹⁶⁵ Like the broader working class, rural families have long been associated with networks of kith and kin and with the informal economy.¹⁶⁶ In short, differences Williams identifies with the working class, rural sociologists have historically identified with rural families.

Mobility is another issue for working-class and rural families. While those in the professional-managerial class may take geographical mobility “for granted as a necessary part of American life,”¹⁶⁷ rural residents are associated with immobility. Mobility is typically lacking because population churn tends to be low in rural communities, due to a lack of transferrable social and human capital and an intergenerational attachment to place.¹⁶⁸

Meanwhile, rural economists associate rural labor markets with sparse, scattered, and low paying jobs and, more recently, with a proliferation of contingent work.¹⁶⁹ Rural workers’ commutes may be equally as burdensome as those of suburbanites and exurbanites dealing with

which feels like a “natural extension of the reciprocal relationships”); *see also* SHERMAN, *supra* note 4, at 185.

164. WILLIAMS, *supra* note 1, at 169 (quoting MARJORIE L. DEVAULT, FEEDING THE FAMILY: THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF CARING AS GENDERED WORK 206 (1991) (“[W]orking-class families live relatively close to their relatives and spend a large part of their social time with kin.”) & ANNETTE LAREAU, UNEQUAL CHILDHOODS: CLASS, RACE, AND FAMILY LIFE 57 (2003) (“[Adults] speak daily with their brothers and sisters and their parents. Cousins play together several times a week.”)).

165. *Id.*

166. *See generally* Lisa R. Pruitt, *Rural Families and Work-Family Issues*, SLOAN WORK & FAM. ENCYCLOPEDIA (2008), available at http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1117580; SMITH, *supra* note 134, at 12.

167. SHERMAN, *supra* note 4, at 184–85; *see also* Berg, *supra* note 26 (quoting CHRISTOPHER LASCH, THE REVOLT OF THE ELITES 5–6 (1995) (“Success has never been so widely associated with mobility Ambitious people understand that a migratory way of life is the price of getting ahead. It is a price they gladly pay, since they associate the idea of home with intrusive relatives and neighbors, small-minded gossip, and hidebound conventions. The new elites are in revolt against ‘Middle America,’ as they imagine it: technologically backward, politically reactionary, repressive in its sexual morality, middlebrow in its tastes, smug and complacent, dull and dowdy.”)).

168. Pruitt, *supra* note 5, at 355, 372; SHERMAN, *supra* note 4, at 184.

169. Diane K. McLaughlin & Alisha J. Coleman-Jensen, *Nonstandard Employment in the Nonmetropolitan United States*, 73 RURAL SOC. 631 (2008) (documenting the extent to which non-metro workers are involved in contingent work, part-time work, variable-hour work, or are otherwise without healthcare insurance and other benefits associated with good jobs); Pruitt, *supra* note 5, at 350–51; Robert Gibbs, Lorin Kusmin & John Cromartie, *Low-Skill Jobs: A Shrinking Share of the Rural Economy*, AMBER WAVES, 38 (Nov. 2004), available at <http://www.ers.usda.gov/AmberWaves/November04/Features/lowskilljobs.htm> (reporting most low-skill jobs in rural areas are in the service sector).

urban sprawl,¹⁷⁰ if not more so. Compared to their urban counterparts, however, rural parents have fewer options for employment, transportation, and child care.¹⁷¹

In light of pervasive economic restructuring of recent decades, it should come as no surprise that rural families, like working-class families generally,¹⁷² are not truly static. They may desire stasis, but they have absorbed enormous economic and social change over the past few decades.¹⁷³ Most notably, rural women now work outside the home at the same rate as their urban counterparts.¹⁷⁴ Indeed, rural mothers have worked outside the home at rates higher than urban mothers for several decades.¹⁷⁵ As a related matter, the percentage of female-headed households is now on par across the rural–urban axis.¹⁷⁶ Yet rural women earn

170. See Katharine B. Silbaugh, *Sprawl, Family Rhythms, and the Four-Day Work Week*, 42 CONN. L. REV. 1267 (2010); Katharine B. Silbaugh, *Women's Place: Urban Planning, Housing Design, and Work-Family Balance*, 76 FORDHAM L. REV. 1797 (2007).

171. See KRISTIN SMITH, EMPLOYMENT RATES HIGHER AMONG RURAL MOTHERS THAN URBAN MOTHERS, CARSEY INST. (Fall 2007), available at http://www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu/publications/FS_ruralmothers_07.pdf (discussing the need for better child-care options for rural families). See generally Pruitt, *supra* note 166.

172. See Carbone, *supra* note 22 (documenting changes in both working-class families and those with more educated parents, all over the past half century).

173. SHERMAN, *supra* note 4, at 184 (discussing the economic restructuring of Golden Valley, which caused its residents to move only to return because they “hated the unfamiliar places, they couldn’t afford to buy houses in more competitive markets, and they missed their families back home.” Once back, however, they faced “severe reductions in their family incomes and the loss of essential benefits”); SMITH, *supra* note 134, at 12 (discussing the impact of rural restructuring on women’s work); Pruitt, *supra* note 5, at 378–82 (summarizing many studies of the gender consequences of rural economic restructuring).

174. See SMITH, *supra* note 171, at 1 fig.1 (reporting that in 2004, 69% of rural mothers with children under the age of six were employed, compared to 63% of their urban counterparts; 46% of rural mothers with less than a high-school education were employed, compared to 41% of urban mothers with that education level; 84% of rural mothers with a college degree were employed, compared to 72% of urban mothers who had college degrees). Indeed, rural mothers have had higher employment rates than urban mothers for the past twenty-five years. These higher rural employment rates are linked to the higher level of rural poverty. In 2004, 24% of rural mothers with young children lived in poverty, while the rate for urban women with young children was 20%. *Id.* at 2. Rural mothers who have not completed high school earn on average \$13,200, while urban women with the same level of education earn \$16,600. *Id.* Rural women who are not mothers, however, tend to be employed at lower rates than their urban counterparts. *Id.*

As for the argument that this difference is offset by the lower cost of living in rural places, see Mark Nord, *Does it Cost Less to Live in Rural Areas? Evidence from New Data on Food Security and Hunger*, 65 RURAL SOC. 104 (2000) (noting that while housing costs tend to be lower in rural areas, the cost of other necessities tend to be higher). *But see* Dean Jolliffe, *The Cost of Living and the Geographic Distribution of Poverty*, U.S. DEP’T OF AGRIC. ECON. RES. SERV. (2006), <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/ERR26/> (suggesting that poverty measures be adjusted to account for cost-of-living differences between metro and nonmetro areas, which would cause metro poverty levels to be greater than nonmetro levels between 1991 and 2002).

175. SMITH, *supra* note 171, at 1 fig.1 (showing data for 1979, 1989, 1999, and 2004).

176. Pruitt, *supra* note 5, at 356 n.98 (citing Daniel Lichter & Leif Jensen, *Rural America in Transition: Poverty and Welfare at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century*, in RURAL DIMENSIONS OF

less than their urban counterparts and are generally more vulnerable financially because rural economies lack diversity, and educational opportunities are limited. To use Williams's terminology, rural mothers are more likely to be "one sick child away from being fired"¹⁷⁷ than to be joining the "opt-out revolution."¹⁷⁸

The structural and cultural characteristics that distinguish rural livelihood are typically overlooked by law and policy-makers, although they profoundly influence work-family relations and the well-being of rural residents more broadly. One law that proved especially ill fitting for rural populations was welfare reform. People can't go to work if there are no jobs, or—where jobs do exist—if no transportation is available to get them to the jobs. Yet the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Reconciliation Act overlooked these rather critical factors, limiting the period during which a family could receive welfare benefits and forcing parents of young children into the workforce, even absent affordable, adequate child care.¹⁷⁹ By the same token, raising the national retirement age may make sense for knowledge workers but is less feasible for blue-collar laborers whose bodies are literally worn out.¹⁸⁰ These are just two ways in which national laws and initiatives may have different impacts on working-class and rural families, impacts that policy-makers may fail to see. We need a practice, like that implemented in some Australian and New Zealand contexts, to "rural-proof" the laws and policies we imple-

WELFARE REFORM 77, 83, 87 (Bruce A. Weber et al. eds., 2002); *see also* WILLIAM P. O'HARE, CARSEY INST., *THE FORGOTTEN FIFTH: CHILD POVERTY IN RURAL AMERICA* 14 (2009), available at <http://www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu/publications/Report-OHare-ForgottenFifth.pdf> (reporting that in "2007, only 66 percent of rural children were living in married-couple households compared with 70 percent of urban children. In 2008, urban children still had a higher likelihood than rural children of living in a married-couple family"); Sabrina Tavernise & Robert Gebeloff, *Once Rare in Rural America, Divorce Is Changing the Face of Its Families*, N.Y. TIMES, March 24, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/24/us/24divorce.html?_r=1&hpw (reporting rural Americans as likely to be divorced as city dwellers).

177. WILLIAMS, *supra* note 1, at 42 (Chapter 2, "One Sick Child Away from Being Fired").

178. *Id.* at 12 (discussing the 2003 *New York Times Magazine* article, *The Opt-Out Revolution*).

179. *See* SHERMAN, *supra* note 4, at 185 (discussing the irony of workfare); Lisa R. Pruitt, *Missing the Mark: Welfare Reform and Rural Poverty*, 10 J. GENDER RACE & JUST. 439 (2007) (analyzing the difficulties of implementing welfare reform in rural communities); BRUCE A. WEBER, GREG J. DUNCAN & LESLIE A. WHITENER, *RURAL DIMENSIONS OF WELFARE REFORM* (2002), available at http://research.upjohn.org/up_press/162/.

180. BAGEANT, *supra* note 4, at 59 (describing the physical impacts of hard work on the working class: "He's been worked half to death, crippled up, then bled for every remaining penny by doctors and lawyers. In other words, he's your average older working factory guy these days."); SHERMAN, *supra* note 4, at 68–69 (discussing the disability situation among timber workers in Golden Valley); John Leland, *Retiring Later is Hard Road for Laborers*, N.Y. TIMES, Sept. 13, 2010, at A1, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/13/us/13aging.html?scp=3&sq=labor%20ohio%20pain&st=cse> (describing the physical consequences of manual labor on those who do it over a working lifetime).

ment.¹⁸¹ That is, we need to not only consider what laws might be most beneficial to rural residents, but we should also vet national legislation to determine the impact it will have on rural populations in particular.

To be clear, reaching out to these families need not mean capitulating to their aspiration for a male breadwinner model and other trappings of the traditional family.¹⁸² Indeed, these are trappings which fewer and fewer rural and working-class families currently enjoy.¹⁸³ Rather, reaching out means looking for common ground (a topic I address in the next Part) and finding ways to meet their needs for child care, transportation, education, and other types of infrastructure and services associated with well-being and economic growth.

Both Williams and Sherman are pragmatic in addressing issues of politics and policy-making. Sherman suggests that “failure to recognize the importance of moral values to rural poor populations can stymie . . . the success of poverty alleviation policies.”¹⁸⁴ She further contends that policies “will often fall short of the mark when they do not anticipate the ways in which moral and cultural understandings affect geographic mobility, poverty survival strategies, and gender roles.”¹⁸⁵

Alienating rural voters is bad for our country both because it thwarts formation of a coalition that could deliver more progressive policies to close the inequality gap and because it renders rural people an unsympathetic and seemingly undeserving constituency. Recall Frank

181. See PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA, RURAL & REG'L COMM., INQUIRY INTO THE EXTENT AND NATURE OF DISADVANTAGE AND INEQUITY IN RURAL & REGIONAL VICTORIA, at xviii (2010) (recommending “that the State Government establish an independent rural proofing advisory body with an ongoing role to monitor and review legislation, government policy, practices and resources allocation as it has an impact on rural and regional Victorians and in order to ensure that government legislation and policy reflects and responds to the diverse needs of rural and regional Victorians”); see also PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA, RURAL & REG'L COMM., INQUIRY INTO REGIONAL CENTRES OF THE FUTURE, STATE OF VICTORIA 83 (2009) (describing New Zealand’s practice of rural-proofing as “a process for taking into account the circumstances and needs of the rural community (rural people and rural businesses) when developing and implementing policy” and noting that “[a]ccording to this New Zealand model, in addition to the effects of low population density and isolation, regional and rural diversity and dynamism need to be taken into account when considering the implications of proposed policies”).

182. *But see* Gowri Ramachandran, *Confronting Difference and Finding Common Ground*, 34 SEATTLE U. L. REV. 725, 727–30 (2011) (querying the wisdom of endorsing working-class cultural norms, which could prove ruinous for families and might be “a recipe for lasting, gendered subordination that lingers long after formal equality is achieved”).

183. See generally SMITH, *supra* note 134 (comparing rural and urban women’s employment, education levels, and fiscal prospects). As Smith observes, urban mothers are in a better position financially to join the opt-out revolution than are their rural counterparts because their households benefit from higher levels of other sources of income. *Id.* at 13 (noting that college-educated rural mothers have on average \$39,028 in other family income, while their urban counterparts have access to 50% more other family income—about \$60,000).

184. SHERMAN, *supra* note 4, at 24.

185. *Id.*

Rich's characterization of rural residents as "afire with grievances and awash in self-pity as the country . . . leaves [them] behind,"¹⁸⁶ while Michael Katz calls them undeserving of broadband infrastructure—the very type of public investment that could alleviate some rural job woes—because they are "environmentally hostile, energy inefficient and even weak in innovation . . ." ¹⁸⁷ Ouch! Surely rural residents—no less than their urban counterparts—deserve some minimum, adequate level of infrastructure and core government services. They are, after all, stewards of the vast majority of our nation's land. They also provide the labor to grow our food, extract natural resources, and care for many of the recreational venues we value.¹⁸⁸ Finally, they are disproportionately represented among those who fight our wars.¹⁸⁹

IV. MAKING AMENDS: WORK AS A BRIDGE TO SOMEWHERE

Joan Williams "gets class,"¹⁹⁰ as she well demonstrates in *Reshaping the Work-Family Debate: Why Men and Class Matter*. Williams calls on social progressives to recognize our class privilege, just as we have recognized race, gender, religion, sexuality, and other sources of identity as bases of privilege. She points out some of the material consequences of class privilege—higher test scores, better colleges, more secure working lives¹⁹¹—and she also demonstrates how and why class matters to any of a range of social issues that are important to progressives, including those related to the work-family conundrum facing many American adults.

Williams implores us to reach out to the white working class, and she notes that this will require us to be a whole lot nicer than we've been lately. *New York Times* columnist Charles Blow, for one, recently summed up the left's view of the white working class as "hollow, dim

186. Rich, *supra* note 24.

187. Berkes, *supra* note 81; *see also* Klein, *supra* note 81; Klein, *infra* note 189 (expressing public resentment about farm and other rural subsidies).

188. I note that David Brooks's recent musings about how inexplicable Montanans' political views are came after he vacationed there, something he apparently does regularly. *See* Brooks & Collins, *supra* note 26.

189. *See* Ezra Klein, *Vilsack: 'I took it as a slam on rural America,'* N.Y. Times, Mar. 8, 2011, http://voices.washingtonpost.com/ezra-klein/2011/03/vilsack_i_took_it_as_a_slam_on.html (quoting Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack who stated that while only 16% of the nation's population is rural, 44% of those in the military come from rural America).

190. I borrow this phrase from Laura T. Kessler, *Getting Class*, 56 BUFF. L. REV. 915 (2008).

191. WILLIAMS, *supra* note 1, at 165 (offering this example: "Free spirits not born into money cannot count on the second and third chances granted to free spirits born elite. A joy ride by a prep school kid may end with daddy paying a lawyer to get junior's record erased, while a less privileged kid in the same situation could end up with a police record that would permanently bar him from a desirable job."); *see also* JULIE BETTIE, *WOMEN WITHOUT CLASS: GIRLS, RACE AND IDENTITY* 13–14 (2003).

and mean,”¹⁹² while Thomas Frank has referred to the “madness and delusion”¹⁹³ of rural Americans for being taken in by conservatives. These comments are consistent with Joe Bageant’s characterization of how liberals view working-class whites: “[A]ngry, warmongering bigots, happy pawns of the American empire”¹⁹⁴ But Bageant also bothers to ask, if the characterization is accurate, *why* are working-class Americans this way? Joan Williams explores this question too, as did Barack Obama in the context of Bittergate. The broad answer seems to be that cultural, economic, and historical forces have shaped their views, as has a powerful desire to differentiate themselves from those who are (or whom they perceive to be) less disciplined, less hard working, and therefore less morally upstanding. More recently, the left’s condescension has aggravated white workers’ sense of alienation.

Williams’s call for us to be less judgmental of the white working class is a point on which people as diverse as Barack Obama, Jennifer Sherman,¹⁹⁵ and Joe Bageant agree. Williams and Sherman reach this conclusion as academics studying a phenomenon. Perhaps Barack Obama, like Joe Bageant, understands it because he is a class migrant—and one with considerable personal exposure to the white working class.¹⁹⁶

Have progressives achieved what they desire if they build themselves up by denigrating others? I am reminded of Angela Harris’s exhortation in the context of critical race feminism: “[W]holeness and commonality are acts of will and creativity, rather than passive discov-

192. Blow, *supra* note 89.

193. THOMAS FRANK, WHAT’S THE MATTER WITH KANSAS? 10 (2004), *quoted in* WILLIAMS, *supra* note 1, at 212. Frank describes rural America:

[A] panorama of madness and delusion . . . of sturdy blue-collar patriots reciting the Pledge while they strangle their own life chances; of small farmers proudly voting themselves off their own land; of devoted family men carefully seeing to it that their children will never be able to afford college or proper healthcare; of working-class guys in Midwestern cities cheering as they deliver up a landslide for a candidate whose policies will end their way of life.

Id.

194. BAGEANT, *supra* note 4, at 13.

195. Sherman writes:

[I]t nonetheless continues to baffle liberals, who remain naively steadfast in their belief that middle Americans are misguided and unaware of their own interests, even “deranged.” That so many rural voters have for decades now been more interested in morality and family values than economic concerns does not appear to convince liberals of the importance of moral values as political issues. Instead, it seems only to fuel the growing concerns over the culture wars in the popular press, further polarizing the two sides.

SHERMAN, *supra* note 4, at 181; *see also id.* at 24 (“Politicians who ignore the influence of morality over voting behaviors will be unable to reach such populations.”).

196. *See supra* note 64.

ery.”¹⁹⁷ It’s not going to happen if we don’t work at it. Finally, we need to be civil and respectful not only because it will help advance an agreeable political agenda, but because it’s the right thing to do.¹⁹⁸

Williams urges us to learn about life in the Missing Middle,¹⁹⁹ but we also need to learn more about life in rural America. The old saying holds that familiarity breeds contempt, but in the case of rural Americans—as with the working class more broadly—a lack of familiarity may be the culprit. We liberal elites—many of us admittedly what David Brooks calls “coastal haute bourgeoisie”—have become so metrocentric that we cannot see our rural counterparts.²⁰⁰ We do not know or will not acknowledge, for example, that some rural Americans hunt to feed their families, not to “eviscerat[e] animals for fun.”²⁰¹ We cannot or will not see the harsh lived realities of dual-earner families who subsist on \$30,000 a year, of middle-aged citizens who plan to retire solely on their Social Security income, or of elderly Americans who already get by that way.²⁰² As Williams so thoroughly documents, we have made these people the butt of our jokes. More recently, we have relegated those in rural America to “nobody” status.

In spite of their alienation, however, some of these rural and working-class voters are up for grabs. Many swing voters among the white working class (including rural residents) helped Obama win the White House in 2008. In 2010, however, they took their proverbial toys and went home, reverting to their status as “Republicans by default.”²⁰³ We

197. Angela P. Harris, *Race and Essentialism in Feminist Legal Theory*, 42 *STAN. L. REV.* 581, 608 (1990). In a similar vein, Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres have illustrated how the interests of poor rural whites may be aligned with those of racial minorities so that coalitions among these groups are both possible and fruitful. GUINIER & TORRES, *supra* note 105, at 68, 72–73, 94, 106–07.

198. In this regard, Bageant suggests:

Maybe the next time we on the left encounter such seemingly self-screwing, stubborn, God-obsessed folks, we can be open to their trials, understand the complexity of their situation . . . simply because that would be a kind thing to do and surely would make the ghosts of Joe Hill, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Mohandas Ghandi smile.

BAGEANT, *supra* note 4, at 17.

199. WILLIAMS, *supra* note 1, at 151–53.

200. Cultural critics and humanities scholars have also observed this phenomenon. See Gerald W. Creed & Barbara Ching, *Recognizing Rusticity: Identity and the Power of Place*, in *KNOWING YOUR PLACE: RURAL IDENTITY AND CULTURAL HIERARCHY* 1, 3–4 (Barbara Ching & Gerald W. Creed eds., 1997); ALEXANDER R. THOMAS, POLLY SMITH-THOMAS, GREGORY FULKERSON & BRIAN LOWE, *CRITICAL RURAL THEORY: STRUCTURE*SPACE*CULTURE* (forthcoming 2011).

201. The reference here is to Dowd, *supra* note 27.

202. Bageant calls this “the purest snub of all: invisibility” of the working class, and he sees it as a cause of their attachment to religion, which purveys a message of “worthiness” of all. BAGEANT, *supra* note 4, at 170; see also HOOKS, *supra* note 22, at 38–39 (discussing Christianity as a salve to the poor and working class), at 1 (discussing the invisibility of the poor), at 6 (asserting “working people[’s]” denial of their economic vulnerability).

203. BAGEANT, *supra* note 4, at 51.

need them back, but we will not get them back by name-calling or eye-rolling.

Beyond making nice—and indeed an aspect of doing so—liberal elites need to find common ground with the white working class.²⁰⁴ I suggest that work itself could constitute just that. Currently, one point of misunderstanding between social progressives and the working class regards work. The sources that Williams marshals suggest that the professional-managerial class associate white workers with laziness.²⁰⁵ What else, we may tend to think, would explain their failure to succeed and thrive? After all, they have had the benefit of white privilege.

But a critical insight of Williams's assessment of the white working class is her recognition of the centrality of work to working-class identity. She understands its critical link to morality and, therefore, its role as a basis for distinguishing among white workers. Professor Delgado takes Williams's discussion of the white working class to mean that they are not "proud" of their work and thus are different from the professional-managerial class in a way that represents an intractable conflict.²⁰⁶ I, however, read Williams—and view working-class workers—differently than Professor Delgado. While the working class may not find their work to be particularly fulfilling,²⁰⁷ they are nevertheless proud of it. More precisely, they are proud that they do work—proud of their status as workers. In this sense, they share what Williams calls "work devotion"²⁰⁸ with professionals and managers. But the working class are devoted to work as a means to an end—supporting their families, paying the bills, surviving—not because it is particularly enjoyable or fulfilling, while the latter is an aspiration of the professional-managerial class. Work is a source of pride for workers, even if they take for granted the details of what they do, e.g., shop fitter versus auto mechanic versus administrative assistant versus retail clerk.²⁰⁹ Work is a source of identity for them even

204. Indeed, Williams also urges us to "identify aspects of non-elite culture that offer useful insights for the upper-middle class." WILLIAMS, *supra* note 1, at 213.

205. *Id.* at 154 (noting that academics stereotype working-class whites as lazy and ignorant).

206. Richard Delgado, *Race, Sex, and the Division of Labor: A Comment on Joan Williams's Reshaping the Work-Family Debate*, 34 SEATTLE U. L. REV. 835, 843 (2011).

207. While progressive elites often actually enjoy their work in the sense of finding fulfillment in it, workers are, as Marx famously pointed out, alienated from the fruits of their labor. 1 KARL MARX, CAPITAL: A CRITIQUE OF POLITICAL ECONOMY 716 (Ben Fowkes trans., 1990) (1867) ("Since, before he enters the process, his own labour has already been alienated [*entfremdet*] from him, appropriated by the capitalist, and incorporated within capital, it now, in the course of the process, constantly objectifies itself so that it becomes a product alien to him [*fremder Produkt*].").

208. WILLIAMS, *supra* note 1, at 92, 179, 186, 213.

209. *Id.* at 176–80. Williams writes, "When Flor, a working-class high-school girl, was asked what she wanted to be, she replied, 'I don't know. Maybe a lawyer or a receptionist or something like that. Somethin' in an office.' One cannot imagine an upper-middle-class teenager conflating the social status of a lawyer and a receptionist." *Id.* at 174. "Professional men's sense of personal growth

if they do not discuss its details at social events.²¹⁰ Indeed, as the very label we give them suggests, the working class are defined by work. Thus, a first step toward the dignity and recognition we owe the working class is an acknowledgement that they work—and they work hard.

The working class are not struggling because they are lazy or morally deficient—nor vice versa. The fact that they have less education than we do does not mean they are less intelligent than us. (Have you never worked with an administrative assistant who was so intelligent and motivated that you knew, in a different life, she would be your peer—maybe even your boss?) Many class migrants attribute their success to a combination of luck and hard work. Socially progressive ones who are white will probably acknowledge the role of white privilege, too. Their attitude toward the working class (including extended family and friends or acquaintances from their prior lives) is well captured in a Southern expression that credits divine intervention for their good fortune: “There but for the grace of God go I”²¹¹

Bageant expresses white working-class “failures” in relation to structural barriers and culture, “[J]ust like black and Latino ghetto dwellers, poor and laboring whites live within a dead-end social construction that all but guarantees failure.”²¹² Barack Obama has also recognized the white perspective on privilege and work: “[A]s far as they’re concerned, no one handed them anything. They built it from scratch. They’ve worked hard all their lives”²¹³ Once we recognize that the myth of white working-class laziness is just that—a myth—we may find that work itself is a bridge of understanding, a bridge to somewhere. After all, both the working class and well-educated social progressives are, in admittedly different ways, defined by their work.

Williams laments that reform-minded progressives have pitted themselves against the working class. I do, too, and I also regret the pitting of rural and small-town interests and culture against the metropolitan

is related not to their perceptions of the quality of family life but to their workplace success. Non-elite men are more likely to view jobs as a way to provide for their families” *Id.* at 185.

210. *Id.* at 185–86 (noting that working-class folks don’t talk about their work in social situations; they do not, for example, make small talk around questions such as “what do you do?”).

211. Of course, some class migrants take more personal credit for their class ascension. This attitude may explain the politics of people like John Boehner, Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. Boehner is a white class migrant who, as a Republican, endorses small government and personal responsibility. See Jennifer Steinhauer & Carl Hulse, *Boehner’s Path to Power Began in Small-Town Ohio*, N.Y. TIMES, Oct. 14, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/15/us/politics/15boehner.html?scp=1&sq=john%20boehner%20ohio%20bar%20class%20small&st=cse>. This stance suggests that Boehner takes the lion’s share of credit for his success, perhaps overlooking the ways in which he has benefited from government. He may therefore assume that others are equally capable of class migration.

212. BAGEANT, *supra* note 4, at 9.

213. Obama, *supra* note 153.

hegemony. As Nate Silver commented in 2009 in relation to the rural vote, “[I]f you are going to pit big cities against small towns, it is probably a mistake to end up on the rural side of the ledger.”²¹⁴ This is surely true regarding both the rural–urban alignment of the culture wars and the material consequences of those culture wars for American politics and policy-making.

Bageant urges us to reach out to the white working class, and he reminds us what is at stake:

The fact is that liberals and working people need each other to survive the growing economic calamity delivered to us by the regime that promised to “run this country like a business.” Sooner or later . . . the left must genuinely connect face-to-face with Americans who do not necessarily share all of their priorities, and especially with Americans who have not been voting, if the left is ever to be relevant again to working America. If the left is not about class equity, what is it about?²¹⁵

Likewise, Williams calls us to “treat[] people who think differently with respect”²¹⁶ as a step toward expanding the progressive coalition. This mission is no less important or urgent with respect to workers in rural America than it is with respect to the broader working class.

214. Silver, *supra* note 48.

215. BAGEANT, *supra* note 4, at 15.

216. WILLIAMS, *supra* note 1, at 214.