THE ENDURING CULTURE WAR

JAMES DAVISON HUNTER

LIBERALISM, AS A philosophical movement and cluster of political ideals, is rooted in the challenges of difference. Liberalism was, in large part, an attempt to provide a humane solution to the difficulties posed by the coexistence of a plurality of dissimilar communities in shared political order. The differences that originally animated liberalism were differences of the most profound sort, those over competing understandings of the good and the sources by which those understandings are known and practiced—most important, religious and metaphysical differences. It is a conundrum indeed when individuals and communities hold competing views of the good that they regard as sacred and, therefore, nonnegotiable. Historically speaking, tension, intolerance, conflict, oppression, violence, and carnage are the natural outcomes of this dilemma. No wonder that difference and diversity have continued to bedevil the best minds in political theory over the last three centuries.

The question of liberalism provides one important context for exploring the debate over the culture war because the subtext of this debate is, in fact, the question of difference in our own time and the conflict that such diversity engenders. To pose the question, "Is there a culture war?" is,

implicitly, to ask a prior question, "Are there politically significant differences operating here?" If so—and in this debate, that is a huge "if"—what is the nature and meaning of the differences involved? And what is the historical significance of these differences?

As it has always been, what is at stake in these questions is liberalism itself as it seeks to offer, in ever new and challenging contexts, a framework for toleration, freedom, and justice. Who is a member of the political community? Whose voices are taken seriously and whose grievances are legitimate? When new claims are made and criticisms expressed, how do the institutions of liberal democracy integrate them and mediate them?

In some ways, the story of liberal democracy in America could be told in terms of the expansion of difference and the way the institutions of democracy have ultimately incorporated those differences into the shared political community. Time and again, the ideals and habits of liberalism have been tested by communities, traditions, and interests seeking a reconfiguration of existing understandings of legitimate difference. Over the last century and a half, Catholics, Jews, women, African Americans, Hispanics, a range of other ethnic minorities, and homosexuals have all challenged the established order, and though circumstances are far from perfect, few would disagree that the range of legitimate difference has been expanded and that conditions for each group have dramatically improved.

In the last half of the twentieth century, it was widely presumed that distinctions of faith and religious community had been largely settled and were thus no longer politically important. The Catholicism of John F. Kennedy in the 1960 election was the exception that proved the rule, and in this sense, it was the last gasp of a dying fear. In the main, the sense prevailed that every religious faith had been domesticated through its relegation to the private sphere. The diversity that mattered now was a diversity of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual orientation. These have occupied an enormous amount of time and attention over the last forty to fifty years and, as I mentioned, to great effect.

But something unexpected is suggested by the idea of a "culture war," especially as it was first articulated. It suggests that the contours of difference have changed yet again in ways that raise a troubling possibility:

though configured in ways that are unfamiliar and possibly unprece-dented, perhaps religious and moral differences remain politically conse-quential in late modern America after all. Perhaps, long after it was thought settled, the normative differences rooted in sacred cosmologies (and the communities in which they are embedded) have come to chal-lenge the project of liberal democracy again.

The Culture War Hypothesis . . .

In the late 1980s, I became curious about two phenomena. The first was a question about whether seemingly disparate social, moral, and political issues were tied together in some way. What do the arts have to do with abortion? What does the protest against nuclear power or smoking in public places have to do with gay rights? Studies had been done on sepa-rate issues and separate movements, but there seemed to be points of sym-metry and even connection that were not being explored or discussed. Was there something at play in these disparate issues that linked them together? Many of these conflicts were playing out in local settings around the country with no connection to each other; yet across the range of issues, the lines of division were similar, the rhetorical strategies and cul-tural motifs were comparable, and the patterns of engagement were alike. Might there be a cultural thread that could make sense of this confusing jumble?

The second phenomenon concerned who was lining up on different sides of different issues and why they were doing so. One does not have to know much about American or Western history to know that when Protestants, Catholics, and Jews are talking and working together and even forming alliances in unusual and contradictory ways, that something counterintuitive and perhaps unprecedented is taking place. Given the appalling legacy of anti-Catholicism and anti-Semitism in the United States alone, these developments were remarkable and, on the face of it, historically significant.

Something was going on, but how best to account for it?

One of the central questions of sociological theory concerns how a social order is constituted and legitimated. To be sure, categories rooted in economic and class interest—the categories of "left" and "right"—were

useful as long as they reflected the dominant axis of political tension. But with the collapse of state socialism abroad and the disarray of the labor movement, philosophical Marxism in the academy, and Keynesianism at home, the explanatory power of those categories had weakened, to say the least. Indeed, it is striking just how inadequate social class as a variable (or, for that matter, the categories deriving from political economy) is in accounting for variance in this conflict—in general and in the particulars. This has been particularly true in the United States. The axis of tension that the terms left and right originally described was just not as salient in making sense of political conflict and social change as it once was.

Neither was standard demographic analysis, the staple of sociological practice. Education and residence accounted for some part of the variance, as did gender, though there were highly educated and moderately educated people on all sides of these issues. Similarly, urban dwellers could be found on all sides of these issues, and women were also divided on most of these social issues (and not insignificantly, on abortion). One could find associations in age and occupation, but these too were weak. All ages and all occupations could be found taking most every position. None of these factors individually or together offered a coherent explanation.

Nor could any of these older models explain the passion, commitment, and sacrifice of the actors involved. Something was going on that mainstream social science was either ignoring or for which it could not provide a good explanation. The argument about the culture war was an attempt to address this puzzle.

The heart of the culture war argument was that American public culture was undergoing a realignment that, in turn, was generating significant tension and conflict. These antagonisms were playing out not just on the surface of social life (that is, in its cultural politics) but at the deepest and most profound levels, and not just at the level of ideology but in its public symbols, its myths, its discourse, and through the institutional structures that generate and sustain public culture.

Thus underneath the myriad political controversies over so-called cultural issues, there were yet deeper crises over the very meaning and purpose of the core institutions of American civilization. Behind the politics of abortion was a controversy over a momentous debate over the meaning of motherhood, of individual liberty, and of our obligations to one

another. Within the politics of government patronage, including the dispute over the National Endowment for the Arts and its funding of controversial art, one could find a more consequential dispute over what constitutes art in the first place and the social ideals it symbolically communicates. Beyond the politics of educational curriculum, the quarrels over textbooks in public schools constituted a more serious disagreement over the national ideals Americans pass on to the next generation. Behind the contentious argument about the legal rights of gays and lesbians was a more serious debate over the fundamental nature of the family and appropriate sexuality. Within the politics of church and state, the various (and seemingly trivial) altercations over Ten Commandment presentations on public property overlaid a more significant debate about the role of religious institutions and religious authority in an increasingly secular society. And so it goes. Cumulatively, these debates concerning the wide range of social institutions amounted to a struggle over the meaning of America.

This, however, was not the end of the matter. Underneath the push and pull of these institutional conflicts were competing moral ideals as to how public life ought to be ordered and maintained. These were not mere political ideologies, reducible to party platforms or political scorecards, but rather moral visions from which the policy discussions and political disputes derived their passion. Embedded within institutions, these ideals were articulated in innumerable ways with every conceivable nuance and shade of variation. *As they were translated into the signs and symbols of public discourse*, however, they lost their complexity and nuance and thus divided into sharply antagonistic tendencies.

One moral vision—the traditionalist or orthodox—is predicated upon the achievements and traditions of the past as the foundation and guide to the challenges of the present. Though this vision is often tinged with nostalgia and is at times resistant to change, it is not simply reactionary, backward looking, or static. Rather, the order of life sustained by this vision is, at its best, one that seeks deliberate continuity with the ordering principles inherited from the past. The social end is the reinvigoration and realization of what are considered to be the very noblest ideals and achievements of civilization.

Against this is a progressivist moral vision that is ambivalent to the legacy of the past, regarding it partly as a useful point of reference and partly as a source of oppression. Instead, the order of life embraced by this vision is one that idealizes experimentation and thus adaptation to and innovation with the changing circumstances of our time. Although sometimes marked by traces of utopian idealism, it is not merely an uncritical embrace of all things new. The aim of the progressivists' vision is the further emancipation of the human spirit and the creation of an inclusive and tolerant world.

But here, too, there is more to say. Underneath the public policy disputes, the institutional crises, and the conflicting moral visions, there were and are different and competing understandings of what is real and the means by which we can know what is real, and of what is good and true and the means by which we can know these things. Here, too, among citizens and within institutions, one can find nearly infinite variations. As these have become transformed into a grammar of public discourse, however, one can discern two different and competing impulses. Animating one side of the cultural divide is a sense of ultimate reality that is rooted in transcendent authority. Whether apprehended through the foundations of nature or religion or tradition, one can discern and articulate relatively fixed, even eternal, standards through which we can justly organize our personal and collective existence. Animating the other side of the cultural divide is a sense of ultimate reality that rejects the possibility of fixed standards outside of human experience, privileging instead that which we can apprehend through our senses from our personal experience. By these lights, what is real or what is good is not so much constant and enduring but rather much more personal and dependent on the particularities of context.

In sum, at the root of this conflict are competing understandings of the good and how the good is grounded and legitimated. These understandings are reflected in competing moral visions of collective life and the discourse sustaining those visions. In turn, these are manifested in competing institutions (their elites and their interests) that generate this cultural output. All of this plays out dialectically.

Another way to say this is that against the old axis of tension and conflict that was rooted in political economy, a "new" axis of tension and

conflict has emerged that is fundamentally cultural in nature. The historical significance of this new axis has been evident in the ways in which it cuts across age-old divisions among Protestants, Catholics, and Jews. The orthodox traditions in these faiths now have much more in common with each other than they do with progressives in their own faith tradition, and vice versa. The polarity of *this* axis seems to better account for the variation in positions on a wide range of popular domestic disputes. In turn, it is the polarities of *these* controversies through which a far-reaching struggle for national identity is carried on.

It is important to bracket the modifier "new" when describing these tensions because they have existed and become institutionalized in the West since at least the mid-1700s. For the most part, however, these tensions remained isolated within fairly remote philosophical discourse, arcane ecclesiastical disputes, or, at most, legal conflict over the constitution of the state. It is only since the 1960s and 1970s that these tensions have played out within popular domestic politics.[1] The historical significance of these tensions, however, could be measured by a realignment taking place within the larger public culture. The politically significant distinctions in American public religion and culture, it seemed, were no longer those between Protestants, Catholics, Jews, and secularists, as they had been for several centuries. Rather, the more salient distinction was between orthodox and progressivist impulses and tendencies within major religio-philosophical traditions. The result has been a historically unprecedented set of alliances among conservative religio-cultural factions and among progressivist religio-cultural factions that have played out in public policy disputes and in opposing nationalist rhetoric.

Given the Enlightenment-based assumptions about intellectual discourse in the last century, it is counterintuitive to suggest that "religion" is at all relevant to a discussion about the ordering of public life. But the institutional manifestations of religion merely point to the normative foundations by which any society, including late twentieth-century America, is constituted and legitimated. As Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Karl Marx, and Georg Simmel well understood, religion—broadly defined as systems of sacred meaning—was *anything* but irrelevant to the dynamics of conflict and change in the nineteenth century. Broadly conceived, the culture war hypothesis proposes that it remains just as central today.

. . . and Its Critics

Not long after the culture war hypothesis was laid out, a small cottage industry of academic sociologists and political scientists emerged to counter the argument. Over the years, the criticism has been substantial and emphatic. The position is unwavering and resolute: no mincing of words and few, if any, qualifications. Steven Brint declared flatly, "There is no culture war in America."[2] Christian Smith and colleagues stated that "the culture war is a myth."[3] Paul DiMaggio and his colleagues concluded that, with the exception of abortion, there was "no support for the proposition that the United States has experienced dramatic polarization in public opinion on social issues."[4] According to Nancy Davis and Robert Robinson, the image of warring factions locked in struggle "is simply false." There is no "monolithic conservative phalanx marching lockstep to the tune of such groups as the Christian Coalition."[5] Ultimately, they declared, the culture war "exists mainly in the minds of media pundits, leaders of political movements, and academics."[6] Such stark demarcations of cultural difference do not—indeed *cannot*—exist, as Randall Balmer noted, because of the "relative absence of ideology in American politics, culture, or religion."[7] Jeremy Rabkin made a similar case for "the culture war that isn't."[8] Alan Wolfe concluded in a like manner, noting that there "is little truth to the charge that middle-class Americans, divided by a culture war, have split into two hostile camps."[9] Wayne Baker echoed this view, saying "that the culture war is largely a fiction."[10] In the latest in this run of criticism, Morris Fiorina declared what had already been said many times before: "The culture war script embraced by journalists and politicos lies somewhere between simple exaggeration and sheer nonsense. There is no culture war in the U.S.—no battle for the soul of America rages, at least none that most Americans are aware of."[11] The polarizing impulses of the culture war are, then, a fabrication. The obverse, in fact, is true. As Wolfe put it, America is "one nation, after all." As such, the time has since long come for social observers to "move beyond the culture war."[12]

In answer to the question about the nature and significance of the wide-ranging social and cultural issues playing out in public life, then, these critics argued, in effect, that nothing of particular consequence was occurring at all. These controversies have no particular meaning and,

therefore, do not need further examination, exploration, or discussion because there is no significant normative conflict in America. No alternative explanations are needed because there are no politically consequential religio-cultural differences in America. And all of these categorical judgments were being made in the context of the Clarence Thomas Senate confirmation controversy (a foreshadowing of the current debates over Supreme Court justices); the sex-saturated politics of the impeachment of the forty-second U.S. president; the rise of Fox News and its overt politicization of television journalism; the polarizing dynamics of three presidential elections, including the ongoing realignment of the major parties; and the continuing battles over gay rights that have included thirteen state referendums outlawing gay marriage, not to mention innumerable local controversies around the country that divided churches, schools, neighborhoods, and communities.

How does one explain such stark disagreement over the existence, much less the meaning, of cultural conflict? There are at least three areas that bear further scrutiny. The most obvious concerns the conceptual and methodological differences that may be at play. Are different positions in the debate over the culture war actually referring to and assessing the same thing? The second area is the empirical reality. What are the critics focusing upon and what are they ignoring in order to make their case? The third area concerns the theoretical assumptions brought to bear on the subject of cultural conflict and whether those assumptions are realistic and credible.

Conceptual and Methodological Considerations: The Nature and Meaning of Culture

One explanation for the striking divergence of opinion has to do with *culture* itself—that which is, or perhaps is not, "at war." What is the nature of culture? How do social scientists understand it conceptually and approach it methodologically?

One common way of thinking about culture is in terms of the prevailing values and norms found in a society. These norms and values are composed of the attitudes and opinions, beliefs, and moral preferences of individuals. Culture, then, is the sum total of attitudes, values, and opinions of

the individuals making up a society. This view of culture became especially popular among social scientists in the 1950s and 1960s. New developments in public opinion surveys at that time reinforced this approach by providing more refined techniques for sampling average Americans and recording their personal points of view. One school of thought in this vein regarded culture and personality as roughly symmetrical, as mirroring each other. In this view culture was little more than the personality of its individual members writ large, its modal character type or types; understanding culture, in turn, provided a window on the psyche of its individual members. Even after the "culture and personality" studies went out of fashion, survey research and the view of culture it implied remained a dominant approach to culture in the social sciences.

As much as survey research had advanced the understanding of social life, by the late 1970s and early 1980s, American sociology was beginning to recognize the weaknesses of this approach to culture. The methodological individualism implied in survey methods came to be seen by many as narrowly conceived, limited in scope, reductionistic in its claims, and, in the end, facile in its explanations. In general, the view that culture was simply the sum total of subjective attitudes and opinions of ordinary people was seen as inadequate by itself to account for the complexity of culture. Surveys proved important to social analysis, but alone they were insufficient to explain the intricacies of social life.

At the same time, American cultural sociology discovered afresh the contributions and relevance of neoclassical, structural, and poststructural approaches to the study of culture that had been established and further developed in Continental and British social theory.[13] This led to a greater focus on the patterns of culture, its institutional dimensions, its production within organizations, the artifacts it produced, the resources mobilized behind it, the elites who wielded disproportionate influence in articulating the guiding narratives, and so on. It also gave impetus to understanding public symbols and rituals, public discourse, the unspoken structures of authority, and how all of these things relate to the formation of collective identity and to the public philosophies and shared narratives that legitimate its claims.

It is in the context of this evolving history in social science and the changing conceptual and methodological strategies for understanding

culture that we begin to see how two different positions on the culture war debate have emerged. To wit, all of the empirical tests of the culture wars hypothesis—*all of them*—have been based exclusively upon individual-level data from either public opinion surveys or face-to-face interviews. The result has been predictable: on the whole, American public opinion simply did not reflect the divisions described by the argument of deep normative conflict. Paul DiMaggio and his colleagues, for example, reviewed survey data from the General Social Survey (GSS) and the National Election Studies (NES) from the early 1970s to the mid-1990s and found that, with the exception of abortion, there was "no support for the proposition that the United States has experienced dramatic polarization in public opinion on social issues."[14] Davis and Robinson also drew from the GSS and concluded that "most Americans occupy a middle ground between the extremes."[15] A dissertation by Yonghe Yang in 1996 covered much the same ground in the GSS (from 1977 to 1996) and found "no hint of ideological dichotomy."[16] Wolfe interviewed dozens of people from eight different communities and found much the same.[17] Smith and his coworkers conducted in-depth interviews of 128 individuals and found that most people were oblivious to the very concept of a culture war, and among those who had heard of it, most were disdainful of the idea.[18] Baker's work was based upon the World Values Survey, and Fiorina's study was based primarily on a review of analyses of GSS, NES, and Gallup public opinion data.[19] In sum, all of the criticisms of the culture war hypothesis were based on an implicit view of culture and an older form of cultural analysis that were, to say the least, limited from the outset.

Collective psychology is fine as far it goes; it can teach much about the patterns and trends of opinion and belief. But the argument about a culture war in America was based upon a different understanding of culture, one that was strongly influenced by the structural turn in cultural analysis. This turn viewed culture not as the norms and values residing in people's heads and hearts but rather as systems of symbols and other cultural artifacts, institutions that produce and promulgate those symbols, discourses that articulate and legitimate particular interests, and competing fields where culture is contested. For my own part, the heart of the culture war hypothesis was the contention that there had been a realignment in American

public culture that had been and still is institutionalized chiefly through special interest organizations, denominations, political parties, foundations, competing media outlets, professional associations, and the elites whose ideals, interests, and actions give all of these organizations direction and leadership. These dynamics played out in different ways in different cultural fields. In all, the dynamics of collective identity formation—the necessity for an "other" to clarify the moral boundaries of the group and reinforce the moral authority of its elites—added force to the polarizing impulses at work. Even further, the polarizing tendencies of competing fields of cultural production were aggravated by the technologies of public discourse. Through these structural developments and processes, competing moral visions and the conflict itself have become, in Durkheim's phrase, a reality *sui generis*, a reality much larger than—indeed, autonomous from—the sum total of individuals and organizations that give expression to the conflict. It was and is only at this level that the term *culture war*—with its implications of stridency, polarization, mobilization of resources, and so on—has its greatest conceptual force.[20] It explains, among other things, how it is that our public discourse becomes disembodied from (and hence larger than and independent of) the individual voices that give it expression. In this way it explains how our public discourse becomes more polarized than Americans as a people are.

It is true that some critical commentary never engaged the scholarly works that put forward the idea of cultural conflict but rather focused on the popular usage of the term.[21] While one would think that the scholars' more sophisticated understanding of a popular concept would invite a more rigorous conceptualization and analysis, this was not the case. As such, references to popular treatments tended to slide seamlessly into citations of more scholarly sources, with the net effect being to render suspect any use of the term *culture war*. In the end many of the critics created a straw man that then proved relatively easy to knock down.

The problem is, none of the critics addressed the *culture* in culture wars. None of them examined the question of the culture war from the theoretical, conceptual, or methodological approaches of the new sociology of culture. None examined the structures of culture that produce and distribute symbols, ideas, arguments, and ideologies; their social location and their interests; their implicit formulations of moral authority; the antagonistic

discourses; and so on. Rather, every criticism was based upon the most narrow and constricted conceptualization of culture, thus looking for conflict where the conflict has always been weakest (for example, the average opinions found in public opinion). From this came the authoritative conclusion that politically consequential normative conflict was simply nonexistent. Not to put too fine a point on it, the culture war argument has always been about culture, in all its complexity of meaning within the social sciences, and the conflict that continues to unfold in, around, and through it—and not about conflict over the attitudes and opinions of average Americans. It is in this way that the critics have overstated their case. Their data simply cannot support the conclusion that significant *cultural* conflict is nonexistent and, therefore, imaginary.

A False Debate?

On the face of it, then, the disagreement between those who propose and those who reject the culture war hypothesis would seem to be conceptual and methodological, not substantive in nature. Given such differences in approach, it is difficult to imagine that there would not be differences in conclusion.

That said, it must also be noted that many of the empirical assessments of public attitudes have been quite serious, perceptive, and helpful. With the exception discussed later in this essay, it is difficult not to agree with much of what has been written about the popular sentiment of average Americans. Within the actual limits that their data allow, there is little to dispute.

For my own part, I have spent considerable effort elaborating these very insights. In my earliest work on evangelicals, I found among these most conservative of Americans strong tendencies toward accommodating liberal modernity; not only in their attitudes toward the family, work, and the self but in their understanding of Scripture and core beliefs. In *Culture Wars* I acknowledged again and again the prevalence of complexity and nuance outside the framework of the polarizing tendencies, and an entire chapter was devoted to the way in which the voices of the majority in the middle are eclipsed.[22] For the book *Before the Shooting Begins*, I drew from a national survey of opinion involving face-to-face interviews

with over 2,000 Americans to explore the complexity of public attitudes toward abortion—the consummate culture wars issue.[23] The middle, it turns out, is quite diverse in its views. On the abortion issue, about 65 percent of the population hold positions in between the extremes, and though not radical in any of their views, neither were their views a muddle, as many have thought. There is a very interesting structure to public opinion among Americans who occupy the middle ground on this issue that represents neither polarization nor consensus.

In 1996 the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture sponsored another survey of political culture in America and found a similar dynamic in the middle that reflected neither contented harmony nor seething discord.[24] My colleague Carl Bowman and I approached the question of the middle from a slightly different vantage point here.[25] Our objective was to go beyond what people think is right or wrong regarding different issues to determine the framework of people's commitments to public culture and, in this way, to explore how the public is divided in its normative commitments. By "framework of people's commitments," we meant the terms by which the *moral* is conceived by individuals—for themselves personally and the larger society. We constructed indexes that measured key moral priorities: the relative commitment to self versus others, to universal truth versus particular (and relative) truths, and to traditional moral codes as guidelines for one's life.[26] We then performed a cluster analysis to identify subgroups of the population that differ significantly in their core commitments.

We found a remarkable range of moral diversity between the extremes of traditionalism and permissivism. Roughly 15 percent of the population can be characterized as *conventionalists*—a moderate-to-conservative group whose cultural orientation seems to be more a matter of form and longstanding practice than conviction. About 14 percent can be loosely characterized as *pragmatists* who tend to be traditional in their moral beliefs and understanding of truth but who are the least self-sacrificial and most hedonistic of all. Finally, about one-fifth of the population was *communitarian*. In general, communitarians are religious liberals who, while fairly skeptical about traditional morality and epistemology, are distinctive in their desire to subordinate personal gain on behalf of collective needs or interests. Within this complex pattern of normative diversity, we

found factions operating with very different moral languages and conceiving of their public commitments in different ways. Moreover, they tend to view opposing sides in complex ways. They find the elites of the progressive left appealing, in many respects, for they embody the American dream of achievement, security, and mobility; they symbolize the success of the system. At the same time, the average American is put off by their aloofness, arrogance, and perceived self-interestedness. By contrast, the Christian right has appeal within the larger public for its patriotism and its defense of a traditional middle-class work, moral, and familial ethic. Yet the public is simultaneously repelled by what it perceives as the Christian right's rigidity, intolerance, and extremism.

To be sure, the relationship of the larger public to American political culture is exceedingly complex. My own contributions to understanding average Americans "in the middle" are in sympathy with precisely what the critics of the culture wars hypothesis have found. But this does not mean that there are no politically significant cleavages in the culture—or in popular opinion, as it turns out.

Empirical Considerations: The Social Composition of Dissensus

To find significant difference in the general population, one has to know where to look for it and then explore its meaning in relation to the larger social order. What, then, can be said for the true believers on each side within the general population?

First, the data set of choice for many of the criticisms of the culture wars hypothesis was the General Social Survey, and as most social scientists acknowledge, the GSS is at best a crude instrument for evaluating public opinion. This is especially true regarding dissensus, since few if any of its questions thoughtfully target the subsamples that make up contesting factions or have been written with the substantive issues of conflict in mind. That said, it is clear even from these data that there are substantial minorities within the American public whose moral and political orientations are strikingly at odds. Their attitudes and opinions also divide much like one would expect from the discourse of the culture wars.

Though one can haggle over precise figures, virtually everyone agrees that somewhere between 10 and 15 percent of the population occupy these opposing moral and ideological universes.

There are different ways of slicing the pie. For example, in terms of political self-identification, the *1996 Survey of American Political Culture* found 9 percent who identified their politics as very liberal to far left and 12 percent who described their politics as very conservative to far right. It is a start but, of course, also a fairly crude measure. Regarding specific issues that constitute the politics of the culture war, one also finds approximately 8 to 12 percent who take strong and uncompromising positions on one side or another. They are not always the same people, but the percentages work out about the same from issue to issue.

Still another way to slice the pie is to combine various moral, religious, and political factors to identify the strongly committed partisans of the Christian right and of the progressive left. Here again, by conservative estimates, these individuals constitute about 5 to 7 percent of the population on each side. Partisans on each side strongly affirm their commitment to American political ideals and are highly involved in civic and political affairs, having significantly more ties to various associations than those who occupy the middle ground.[27] However, individuals in each faction have a very different understanding of the world and their experience in it. They are, in some of the most significant ways, "worlds apart." In our analysis of the *1996 Survey of American Political Culture*, Bowman and I found that there were some differences in social class (with progressives in the upper middle class and conservatives in the middle of the middle class) but less than one might think. Partisans on each side also operate with distinct and fundamentally different understandings of the moral life and moral authority: one group operates from a biblical foundation that tends toward absolutism that reinforces traditional values, while the other tends toward moral improvisation and, in rare instances, relativism that predisposes its members to ambivalence toward traditional moral codes.[28] While both factions strongly affirm the ideals of the American democratic tradition, they understand this tradition differently; at key points they are at odds in their understanding of American history and purpose, and work with different interpretations of the American creed.[29]

Not least is the degree to which each faction is self-conscious of the other and, as such, self-consciously antagonistic toward the other.[30] Majorities in each faction view the other as hypocritical, characterless, self-serving, insensitive to the concerns of most Americans, out of the mainstream, out-of-touch with reality, and undemocratic.[31]

To broaden the analysis, one can look at those who form the larger base, whose view of the world is sympathetic with the most strongly committed partisans though not nearly as resolutely or as coherently. One fruitful way to approach this is not in political terms but rather in terms of how people make sense of moral reality. In the cluster analysis mentioned earlier, Bowman and I found roughly one-fourth of the population who could be called traditionalists (or neotraditionalists) and about one-fourth who could be called permissivists.[32] The traditionalists and neo-traditionalists are, in terms of their commitment to traditional morality, self-sacrifice, and a belief in absolutes, the most conservative people in America today. The traditionalists are overwhelmingly and conservatively theistic in their religious stances and operate with a providentialist view of American history; the neotraditionalists are much the same though they differ by virtue of their better education, urban residence, and representation among racial and ethnic minorities. Inhabiting a fundamentally different moral universe are the permissivists, who make up about 27 percent of the American population. These individuals are perhaps the most secular of all Americans, the most lenient toward traditional morality, the most relativistic toward truth, and among the least self-sacrificial in weighing personal interests against the common good. Urban permissivists tend to be younger and more diverse racially and ethnically compared to their small-town counterparts.

It is clear that within themselves, traditionalists and permissivists do not have political positions that align perfectly with their moral dispositions. Yet the alignment is fairly close, and for this reason these groups represent a natural and broader constituency receptive to political and social mobilization.[33]

The point is this: no matter how one approaches the question, social dissensus is very much present in public opinion. Forming the grassroots support for competing visions are factions that constitute the white-hot

core of difference and dissensus. Disproportionately motivated and active in these issues, they are the most likely to write letters, send checks to the special interest groups and parties that represent them, and volunteer on behalf of their cause. Although these highly partisan citizens may only make up 5 percent of the American population on one side of the cultural divide or the other, in actual numbers they account for 10 to 12 million people on each side. Extending out to less committed constituencies, the numbers who align themselves on one side of the cultural divide or the other can range up to 60 million each.

But this still leaves open the question, are these factions and the larger constituencies of which they are a part politically significant? In his review of *Culture Wars* for *Contemporary Sociology*, Steven Brint posed the question this way: "Can one have a proper war when two-thirds of the army are noncombatants?"[34] The answer brings us back to one of the central contentions of the original argument about the culture war: it has everything to do with the institutions and elites that provide leadership to these factions.

The Work of Elites and the Institutions They Lead

Some of the critics of the culture wars hypothesis do acknowledge that there are activists who are engaged in these issues, but they have tended to view them as noisy extremists who have no particular influence. Wolfe isolates the conflict to "intellectuals."[35] Fiorina prefers to call the typical activist an "exhibitionist, crack-pot, blowhard."[36] Smith and colleagues declare the conflict at this level "distant and trivial."[37] Yet because historical or empirical evidence has not been offered, it turns out that these statements are merely opinion. They beg the question, what is the role of elites? What role do the institutions they lead have in a culture? And what of the activists and the movements they constitute?

To take the structural and institutional approach in cultural analysis is, in part, to think of culture as objects produced. Culture takes the form of ideas, information, news—indeed, knowledge of all kinds—and these in turn are expressed in pronouncements, speeches, edicts, tracts, essays, books, film, works of art, laws, and the like. At the heart of the production

and distribution of cultural output is language. It is, of course, at the root of culture for it provides a medium through which people experience reality. Through both its structure and its meaning, language provides the categories through which people understand themselves, others, and the larger world around them. The power of language resides in its ability to objectify, to make identifiable and "objectively" real the various and ever changing aspects of our experience. When objects are named, when relationships are described, when standards of evaluation are articulated, and when situations are defined, they can acquire a sense of facticity. For this reason formal education, the media of mass communications (including television, radio, newspapers, magazines, and the like), art and music, and religious pronouncements (such as sermons, edicts, policy statements, moral instruction, liturgies and rituals, and the like) all become important conduits for communication and socialization—mechanisms through which a particular vision of reality is defined and maintained. It stands to reason that influence over language, the cultural output through which public language is mediated, and the institutions that produce and manage it all are extraordinarily powerful.[38]

The development and articulation of the more elaborate systems of meaning and the vocabularies that make them coherent are more or less exclusively the realm of elites. They are the ones who provide the concepts, supply the grammar, and explicate the logic of public discussion. They are the ones who define and redefine the meaning of public symbols and provide the legitimating or delegitimating narratives of public figures or events. In all of these ways and for all of these reasons, it is they and the strategically placed institutions they serve that come to frame the terms of public discussion.[39]

In sum, there are elites who are enormously influential for the sway they have over the content and direction of cultural production within specific institutions. These are supported by 5 to 8 percent of the population who are the grassroots activists, the "cultural warriors" who generate and organize resources on behalf of their respective associations and factions. There are yet larger parts of the population whose fundamental orientation leans one way or another but who also tend to be more moderate and less motivated. Yet they can and are mobilized for action in public affairs (even if only by voting) under certain circumstances.

A Case Study, Repeated Myriad Times

Consider briefly a case concerning school reform in Gaston County, North Carolina, in the early 1990s.[40] The school district there was ranked among the bottom 17 school districts in the state (out of 120) in terms of students' academic performance, high dropout rates, and so on. To rectify this matter, the Board of Education put together the Odyssey Project that incorporated five elements of reform, including a change in pedagogy called "outcomes-based education." The school district won a $2 million grant as the beginning of a $20 million grant in a national competition to implement this reform. Through the work of a local Baptist pastor who drew on the support and materials of Citizens for Excellence in Education (CEE)—a religiously based, special interest organization concerned about secular reforms in the public schools—an opposition was mobilized. The CEE was dead set against outcomes-based education, saying it manipulated and indoctrinated children with secular humanism, New Age thinking, and hostility to Christianity. As its director put it, outcomes-based education marked "the end of academic education in America."[41] It was not long before parents and other citizens "packed school board meetings where they monopolized the use of the microphone, harassed school board members, wrote letters to local newspapers, distributed fliers urging parents to act swiftly in order to save their children from the dire effects of this 'radical' school program, circulated warnings [through email] and gathered signatures on petitions."[42]

Soon enough, another national special interest organization, People for the American Way, became involved in direct ways. People for the American Way claimed that the CEE and other organizations of the religious right posed a dire threat to freedom and tolerance in the United States. Each organization was able to use this local dispute to promote its own larger interests far beyond Gaston County. Neither organization conceded rhetorical space or was willing to consider any compromise. A substantive debate about the merits of the reform proposal never occurred, and in the end, all reform efforts were scuttled, the remaining grant funds were forfeited, the school superintendent was forced to resign, and a community was divided. And still, in the end, it was the children of Gaston County who paid the highest price.

Concluding Observations

The culture war does not manifest itself at all times in all places in the same way. It is episodic and, very often, local in its expressions. Examples abound: the dispute over the fate of Terri Schiavo in Pinellas Park, Florida; the conflict over teaching "intelligent design" in Kansas City; the controversy over a teacher in the Bronx who was suspended for bringing bibles to P.S. 5; a clash over a Civil War statue in Richmond, Virginia; the tempest over a priest in St. Paul who refused to serve communion to gays at Mass; the fury of parents in Mustang, Oklahoma, after the superintendent excised a nativity scene at the end of the annual Christmas play; the dispute over speech codes at the University of Pennsylvania; the row over release time for religious instruction in the public schools in Staunton, Virginia; and on it goes.

Yet because what is under dispute and what is at stake is culture at its deepest levels, carried by organizations relating to larger movements, these local, often disparate conflicts are played out repeatedly in predictable ways. The nation was not divided by the Odyssey Program, but the community of Gaston County, North Carolina, was for a time and profoundly, with serious consequences. So have been and are communities and regions all over the nation whenever an event fraught with moral meaning and cultural significance occurs that compels communities to take positions and make decisions.

Are local and national elites and the organizations they represent politically significant? They certainly were in this instance, and as it has become clear over the years, they are in virtually every other instance of cultural conflict as well. It is in their interest to frame issues in stark terms, to take uncompromising positions, and to delegitimate their opponents. Clearly, entire populations are not divided at anywhere near the level of intensity of the activists and the rhetoric, but because issues are often framed in such stark terms, public choices are forced. In such circumstances even communities and populations that would prefer other options, and much greater reason and harmony in the process, find themselves divided.

There is nothing really new here. It would, in fact, seem to be the pattern with social conflict generally, not least when it becomes violent.

"Total war" is a recent, and relatively rare, phenomenon. Throughout most of human history, war has been a minority affair, involving fractions of the warring peoples' populations and, if only by default, the residents of the regions where the battles were actually joined. The idea that wars (even civil wars) should mobilize entire peoples in support of the war efforts is a distinctively modern orientation.[43] And while the two great examples of this kind of war play strongly upon our imaginations, in the last analysis, even they must be reckoned as exceptional. To the extent that such conflicts do demand more "democratic" participation, our national war efforts are frequently geared toward mobilizing the ambivalent masses. Historically, and even in the present, many of our wars still take place at a remove from the citizens of the warring nations. In the early twentieth century, for example, a mere 5,000 dedicated volunteers fought against the army of the United Kingdom for the independence of the Republic of Ireland.[44] The same dynamic of relatively small cores with larger, potentially polarized and mobilized peripheries can be found in the Russian Revolution in 1917 and the Maoist Revolution in the 1940s. In Rwanda it was the extremist elements of the ruling government and armed forces and the extremist militia who organized the massacre of somewhere between 5 and 10 percent of the population in 1994.[45] In the case of the conflict between Arabs and Jews in Israel and Palestine, it is only a minority at the ideological extremes who are involved in perpetuating the conflict. Indeed, polls show that more than eight out of ten Israelis and eight of ten Palestinians support reconciliation, as a general concept.[46] Needless to say, the opinion of this majority is not reflected in the continued presence of conflict in that area. In this light, it seems hasty to dismiss all talk of a culture war just because the combatants are small as a percentage of the whole. Indeed, would the critics have argued that there was no politically consequential conflict over civil rights or the war in Vietnam because the majority of Americans took middling positions?

To be sure, elites, activists, the institutions they lead and grassroots support they mobilize, and the larger publics that form their natural constituencies are enormously consequential. Yet their importance is not just measured by the power to frame issues. It is also inversely measured by the lack of influence of the majority of Americans, who are in the middle, to

contradict this framing and offer an alternative. If the culture war is a myth and the real story is about the consensus that exists in "the middle," then why is it that the middle cannot put forward, much less elect, a moderate who represents that consensus, with all of its complexity and ambivalence on so many issues? If the center is so vital, then why is it that the extremes are overrepresented in the structures of power—not least, political power? In the case of the dispute over educational reform in Gaston County, where was that contented middle—that consensus that critics suggest is so broad and dynamic? In this dispute and in others like it, the middle was there, but as the outcome showed, it was also, sadly, inconsequential.

This, it would seem, helps to explain some of the dynamics at work in the 2004 national election and, indeed, the three or four elections immediately preceding it. Data collected by the Pew Research Center indicate that among white Americans, religio-cultural factors have become among the most important in determining voting preferences in national elections.[47] As the 2004 election demonstrated, Americans who are religiously orthodox and who attend worship services regularly increasingly vote Republican and take conservative stands on the range of cultural policy issues. Conversely, those who are more secular and less connected to religious institutions increasingly vote Democratic and take liberal positions on these same policy issues. Further analysis affirmed a central argument of the original culture wars hypothesis, though now for average citizens:

> The important political fault lines in the American religious landscape do not run along denominational lines, but cut across them. That is, they are defined by religious outlook rather than denominational labels. . . . The survey also found that traditionalists in all three major faith groups overwhelmingly identify with the Republican Party—and that traditionalist Evangelicals do so by a 70 percent to 20 percent margin. The margins among Mainline Protestant and Catholic traditionalists are less lopsided but nonetheless solidly Republican. On the other side of the divide, modernists in all these religious traditions as well as secularists strongly favor the Democrats. Modernist Mainline Protestants, for example, now favor the Democrats by a more than two-to-one margin.[48]

Needless to say, the majority of Americans were not self-conscious partisans actively committed to one side or the other but rather constituted a soft middle that tended one way or inclined toward the other. But the options they ended up with were framed by elites in the parties and special interest organizations, their respective institutions, and the rank-and-file supporters who formed the grassroots support. So, too, were the narratives that contextualized and the arguments that legitimated those choices. Thus, when push came to shove, Americans—even in the middle—made a choice.

Theoretical Reflections on Cultural Conflict

Given their conceptual and methodological starting point, it is not at all surprising that the critics of the culture wars hypothesis focus on collective psychology and the general agreements one can find there. Yet there are theoretical grounds for questioning the narrative of consensus just on the face of it. Put differently, there are good theoretical reasons for assuming just the opposite of consensus—to begin with, the presumption of cultural tension and conflict.

For one, social scientists know that culture is made up of various systems of actors and institutions competing in fields of social life for position, resources, and symbolic capital. This means that culture is, by its very constitution in social life, contested. In a society as pluralistic as ours, the tendencies toward cultural conflict are inevitably intensified because the diversity of actors and institutions in competition has increased. Consciously or not, various actors within our public culture employ strategies and tactics to preserve or expand their ability to shape their field of influence. As always, the stakes are not, at least first, material but rather symbolic: the power of culture is the power to name things, to define reality, to create and shape worlds of meaning. At its most extensive reach, it is the power to project one's vision of the world as the dominant, if not the only legitimate, vision of the world, such that it becomes unquestioned.[49]

And yet the conflictual nature of culture is apparent in an even more basic way than competition over the institutional means of worldmaking. It is a commonplace of structural semiotics that our experience of the world is made meaningful through comparisons and oppositions.[50] A concept, an

idea, a proposition, an object, an action, a group, a movement—these by themselves are not inherently meaningful but rather take on significance in relation to their opposite, something other, or in some cases, simply their absence. The meaning of the world, then, takes shape for us within these multiple and wide-ranging oppositions, in relation to the differences we perceive. Light becomes meaningful in relation to dark or haziness; liberty takes on significance in relation to oppression, coercion, or control; abundance makes sense in relation to scarcity, and so on. Our understanding of the world is framed and illuminated by these comparisons. So it is in social life with the formation of collective identity. The self-understanding of a society or a social group is, by the very nature of things, formed dialectically in distinction to other societies or social groups. Collective identity becomes crystallized most sharply, then, in relation to others who are different. The various means of social control (for example, through punishment, litigation, ostracism, opprobrium, name-calling, and the like) highlight these differences and are, in fact, ways in which social groups assert their own collective identity, establish and reestablish their moral authority, reinforce the group's solidarity, and maintain boundaries between insiders and outsiders. This dynamic is a fundamental feature of social life at all levels of complexity or simplicity. Without such boundary work, a social group, a community, a society faces what may be an even greater danger—its own internal moral disintegration.

And thus culture is, by its very nature, contested—always and everywhere, even when it appears most homogeneous. As Philip Rieff has put it, "Where there is culture, there is struggle"; it is "the form of fighting before the fighting begins."[51] This is so even if it is not always reflected in public opinion. And when there is real war, culture is the centermost part of the war itself. It is so because culture provides the terms by which collectivities seek their own survival and the annihilation of the other. Oppositions are totalized and militarized.

Liberalism and Difference

Is there a politically significant normative conflict in contemporary America? Indeed there is. And the only way to conclude that there is no such normative conflict is to reject all but the most limited and superficial

conceptualization of culture, disregard massive amounts of evidence (even from survey research), and take little to no account of directions suggested by social theory. Does it amount to something justifying the term "culture war?" This phrase is a metaphor, and the appropriateness of any metaphor is measured by how well it fits the subject it describes. To those engaged in this conflict—the activists who are involved in the divisions and the citizens who get caught up in its logic—this is just the right metaphor. Repeatedly one will hear people say that "war" is exactly what it feels like.

Beyond the significant conceptual issues, the methodological differences, the existence of abundant multidimensional evidence to the contrary, and, not least, the fundamental challenge of social theory, there is something curious about the cumulative argument against politically significant normative conflict. There was, of course, a time when the social sciences were far more attentive to questions of conflict—indeed, when conflict was at the heart of social theory and analysis. Such tendencies are nowhere to be found among the critics of the culture wars. What accounts for the absence of curiosity or even openness to the possibility that this conflict exists and might mean something? The unwillingness to consider well-established conceptual, methodological, and theoretical traditions as ways of approaching normative conflict creates an impression of a profession settled in its ways, comfortable with its predispositions and prejudices, and, perhaps, a bit too defensive. To say that the larger story is really one of consensus is to say, in effect, that all is well; there is nothing to be concerned with in these matters. In its net political effect, this kind of social science looks very much like the establishment and consensus-oriented structural functionalism of the mid-twentieth century. Strange as this seems, this similarity is a minor curiosity compared to its larger significance.

Intended or not, in its net effect, this narrative of consensus also entails a denial of difference. The subtext of this narrative is that if there is no politically or historically significant normative conflict, then there are no differences that need to be accounted for or made sense of or addressed. One need not take seriously the claims or grievances of the other. In this case, the denial of difference is a denial of the particularities in social ontologies that define these normative communities. The ideals, practices, and sources of moral authority that constitute collective identity and solidarity are simply ignored. In social life these are by no means the only

differences among groups, communities, and societies, but they are, perhaps, the deepest differences—differences that often enough engender hatred and hostility. For the social sciences, this is not merely a lapse but a missed opportunity. Indeed, on the international scene, we in America and the West are paying a price for our longstanding blindness to these deep normative differences.

There is an issue closer to home as well. Liberalism is, among other things, an attempt to find a way to live together. As a political culture, liberalism not only allows but also protects diversity in its fullest possible scope. However, a denial of deep difference makes us inattentive to important developments in the social order that, whether people like it or not, are challenging anew the ideals and institutions of liberalism. This, too, may be at our peril.

Notes

1. Robert Wuthnow's explanation for this is rooted in the expansion of higher education. Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion* (Princeton University Press, 1988).

2. Steven Brint, "What If They Gave a War . . .?" *Contemporary Sociology* 21, no. 4 (1992): 438–40.

3. Christian Smith and others, "The Myth of Culture Wars," *Cultur*e: *Newsletter of the Sociology of Culture, American Sociological Association* 11, no. 1 (1996): 1, 7–10.

4. Paul DiMaggio, John Evans, and Bethany Bryson, "Have Americans' Social Attitudes Become More Polarized?" *American Journal of Sociology* 102, no. 3 (1996): 690–755.

5. Nancy Davis and Robert V. Robinson "Are the Rumors of War Exaggerated? Religious Orthodoxy and Moral Progressivism in America," *American Journal of Sociology* 102, no. 3 (1996): 756–87.

6. Nancy Davis and Robert V. Robinson. "Religious Orthodoxy in American Society: The Myth of a Monolithic Camp," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 35, no. 3 (1996): 229–45.

7. Randall Balmer, "Culture Wars: Views from the Ivory Tower," *Evangelical Studies Bulletin* 10, no. 1 (1993): 1–2.

8. Jeremy Rabkin, "The Culture War That Isn't," *Policy Review*, no. 96 (1999): 3–19.

9. Alan Wolfe, *One Nation, After All: What Middle Class Americans Really Think about God, Country, Family, Racism, Welfare, Immigration, Homosexuality, Work, the Right, the Left, and Each Other* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1998), pp. 320–21.

10. Wayne Baker, *America's Crisis of Values: Reality and Perception* (Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 109.

11. Morris Fiorina, "What Culture War?" *Wall Street Journal*, July 22, 2004, p. A14. See also Morris Fiorina, Samuel J. Abrams, and Jeremy C. Pope, *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2005).

12. Wolfe, *One Nation*, p. 286.

13. Here I speak of the influence of Claude Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, Louis Althusser, Mary Douglas, Michel Foucault, Jürgen Habermas, and Niklas Luhmann, among others. For a summary of these shifts in the study of culture, see Robert Wuthnow and others, *Cultural Analysis: The Work of Peter Berger, Mary Douglas, Michel Foucault, and Jürgen Habermas* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984). See also Robert Wuthnow, *Meaning and Moral Order: Explorations in Cultural Analysis* (University of California Press, 1987).

14. DiMaggio, Evans, and Bryson, "Americans' Social Attitudes," p. 738.

15. Davis and Robinson, "Rumors of War," p. 780.

16. Yonghe Yang, "The Structure and Dynamics of Ideological Pluralism in American Religion," University of Massachusetts, 1996. For a revised excerpt, see Yonghe Yang and Nicholas J. Demerath III, "What American Culture War? A View from the Trenches as Opposed to the Command Posts and the Press Corps," in *Civil Wars in American Politics*, edited by Rhys Williams (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1997).

17. Wolfe, *One Nation.*

18. Smith and others, "Myth of Culture Wars."

19. See Baker, *America's Crisis of Values*; Fiorina, "What Culture War?"

20. James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), pp. 290–91; James Davison Hunter, *Before the Shooting Begins: Searching for Democracy in America's Culture War* (New York: Free Press, 1994), pp. vii–viii.

21. For example, DiMaggio, Evans, and Bryson targeted the rhetoric of then-Senator Warren Rudman, Wolfe pointed to the arguments of Irving Kristol, and Smith and colleagues admitted that they were most concerned with countering "popular conceptions" of the culture war. See DiMaggio, Evans, and Bryson, "Americans' Social Attitudes"; Wolfe, *One Nation*; and Smith and others, "Myth of Culture Wars."

22. Hunter, *Culture Wars*, pp. 159–61.

23. See Hunter, *Before the Shooting Begins.*

24. Unless otherwise indicated, assertions and quotes in the rest of this and the following section are from James Davison Hunter and Carl F. Bowman, *The State of Disunion: The 1996 Survey of American Political Culture, Summary Report* (Charlottesville, Va.: Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture, 1996). The survey was fielded by the Gallup Organization. The sample consisted of 2,047 respondents representative of the noninstitutionalized population of the continental United

States, age eighteen years and older. It was gathered via stratified, multistage probability sampling of households and weighted to ensure representativeness on key demographic characteristics (race, gender, region, age, and education). The interviews were conducted in person and lasted about one and a half hours on average.

25. Ibid., p. 81.

26. The first index, license versus restraint, measured assent to these cultural adages: "Live for today," "Good fences make good neighbors," "Look out for number one," "Money is the key to life's satisfactions," and "Eat, drink, and be merry." The second, defined as relativism versus absolutism, measured acquiescence to such statements as "Everything is beautiful—it's all a matter of how you look at it," "The greatest moral virtue is to be honest about your feelings and desires," and "All views of what is good are equally valid." Relativism scores were then discounted for those who agreed that "Those who violate God's rules will be punished," "It is my responsibility to help others lead more moral lives," and "We would all be better off if we could live by the same basic moral guidelines." The third index, traditional versus progressive morality, measured the degree of each respondent's moral opposition to divorce, premarital sex, sexual relations between two adults of the same sex, interracial marriage, alcohol, smoking cigarettes, smoking marijuana, watching pornographic films, and swearing or using offensive language.

27. The most conservative individuals belong to an average of 5.29 associations, and the most progressive belong to an average of 4.09 associations. The average for those in the middle was 3.53 associations.

28. Hunter and Bowman, *State of Disunion*, pp. 55, 80, 83–95.

29. As we noted, both extremes share an "exceptionalist" view of American history and purpose. Yet they part company in dramatic ways in how they interpret this: the Christian right operates with a strong, providentialist view of history and purpose that progressive social elites just as strongly reject.

30. Hunter and Bowman, *State of Disunion*, pp. 60–62, and James D. Hunter and Daniel Johnson, "Establishment Sociology and the Culture Wars Hypothesis," unpublished working paper.

31. Ibid., pp. 60–63. John Evans updated the DiMaggio study using 2000 data and found that political partisans in the general population were even more divided than ever. Cited in Jonathan Rauch, "Bipolar Disorder," *Atlantic Monthly*, January-February 2005, p. 104.

32. Traditionalists and neotraditionalists constituted 11 and 16 percent of the population, respectively.

33. We compared the groups according to political self-identification (Hunter and Bowman, *State of Disunion*, p. 89) and on a range of specific issues relating to gay rights (Ibid., p. 93). See also Alan Abramowitz and Kyle Saunders, "Why Can't We All Just Get Along? The Reality of a Polarized America," *Forum* 3, no. 2 (2005): article 1 (www.bepress.com/ forum/vol3/iss2/art1 [September 2005]). Their evidence indicates that "there are deep divisions in America between Demo-

crats and Republicans . . . and between religious voters and secular voters. These divisions are not confined to a small minority of elected officials and activists—they involve a large segment of the public, and they are likely to increase in the future as a result of long-term trends affecting American society."

34. Hunter, *Culture Wars*; Brint "What If They Gave a War," p. 440.

35. Wolfe, *One Nation*.

36. Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope, *Culture War?* p. 105.

37. Smith and others, "Myth of Culture Wars," p. 10.

38. See Stephen Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*, 2d ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

39. See David A. Snow and Robert Benford. "Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization," *International Social Movement Research* 1 (1988): 197–217, and David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford, "Master Frames and Cycles of Protest," in *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, edited by Aldon D. Morris and Carol M. Mueller (Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 133–55. This is the first reason why the vast majority of Americans who are somewhere in the middle of these debates are not heard. They have no access to the tools of public culture in the way elites do.

40. This account is fully described in Kimon Sargeant and Edwin L. West Jr., "Teachers and Preachers: The Battle over Public School Reform in Gaston County, North Carolina," in *The American Culture Wars*, edited by James Nolan (University of Virginia Press, 1996), pp. 35–59.

41. Ibid., p. 42.

42. Ibid., p. 41.

43. Maurice Pearton, *Diplomacy, War and Technology since 1830* (University Press of Kansas, 1984).

44. See Peter Hart, "The Social Structure of the Irish Republican Army 1916–1923," *Historical Journal* 42, no. 1 (1999): 207–31. At the height of the fighting—between 1916 and 1923—there were up to 100,000 individuals in the Irish Republican Army, but for the majority of the conflict, there were 5,000 volunteers who were considered "reliable" and "active" (p. 209), and these were "disproportionately skilled, trained, and urban."

45. Extremists in the military and government bitterly opposed the Arusha Accord, a power-sharing treaty for warring factions in Rwanda, and were the likely culprits in the assassination of Rwandan president Juvenal Habyarimana on April 6, 1994. "Within an hour of the plane crash, the Presidential Guard, elements of the Rwandan armed forces (FAR) and extremist militia (*Interahamwe* and *Impuzamugambi*) set up roadblocks and barricades and began the organized slaughter, starting in the capital Kigali, of nearly one million Rwandans in 100 days' time. Their first targets were those most likely to resist the plan of genocide: the opposition Prime Minister, the president of the constitutional court, priests, leaders of the Liberal Party and Social Democratic Party, the Information Minister, and tellingly,

the negotiator of the Arusha Accord." William Ferroggiaro, ed., "The U.S. and the Genocide in Rwanda 1994: Evidence of Inaction," *National Security Archive*, August 20, 2001 (www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB53/).

46. "General support for reconciliation among Israelis has also increased and stands now at 84 percent compared to 80 percent in June 2004. Eighty-one percent of the Palestinians support reconciliation today compared to 67 percent last June. More important, however, is the consistent across the board increase in support for a list of specific reconciliation steps, varying in the level of commitment they pose to both publics." Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, "Joint Israeli-Palestinian Public Opinion Poll, March 2005: Summary of Results," March 16, 2005 (www.pcpsr.org/survey/polls/2005/p15ejoint.html).

47. Pew Research Center, *Trends 2005* (Washington: 2005). See also John C. Green and others, "The American Religious Landscape and the 2004 Presidential Vote: Increased Polarization," Survey report (Washington: Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, February 3, 2005).

48. Pew Research Center, *Trends 2005*, p. 28. This statement mirrored one made thirteen years earlier in Hunter, *Culture Wars*.

49. Lukes, *Power*.

50. I do not at all subscribe to orthodox structuralist assumptions about duality but fully recognize that objects may have multiple meanings and interpretations depending upon circumstances. See the critique of Claude Lévi-Strauss in Mary Douglas, "The Meaning of Myth, with Special Reference to 'La Geste d'Asdiwal,'" in *The Structural Study of Myth and Totemism*, edited by Edmund Leach (London: Tavistock), pp. 49–70.

51. Phillip Rieff, *Sacred Order/Social Order*, vol. 1: *My Life among the Deathworks* (University of Virginia Press, 2006).