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JOHN WHITE

From *The Values Divide*

Quite a while before the significance of morality and values as a dividing line within the American polity became a standard line of analysis by political scientists and commentators, John White had already spotted it. The "values divide" began decades ago, based on issues that had not yet entered the political arena directly. White discusses clashing views on the family, on marriage, on church attendance, on lifestyles. The way that public officials from both political parties have reacted to the struggle over values is significant for political discourse in America. Instead of looking for middle ground, White observes, most politicians have fled to the extremes where the Democrats and Republicans find themselves most at odds with one another.

THIS BOOK DESCRIBES the values divide that began in the 1960s and accelerated during the Clinton years. This is not my first look at the subject. In 1988, I completed *The New Politics of Old Values*, which studied how Ronald Reagan transformed the presidency by emphasizing the values of "family, work, neighborhood, peace and freedom." Reagan's values politics worked well in his day. But we are now as far removed from Reagan's inauguration as Reagan himself was from John F. Kennedy's swearing-in. In the intervening decades, it is undoubtedly clear that something far more politically significant than the victories of Bill Clinton or George W. Bush has occurred. One incident illustrates the change; back in 1988 when I was completing *The New Politics of Old Values*, Democrat Gary Hart removed himself from the presidential contest when rumors of his purported adultery became the focus of constant media attention. Hart complained that excessive media attention to his personal life had driven the issues he wanted to raise off the front pages: "That link with the voters that lets you listen to their concerns and often your ideas and proposals had been broken." That link broke when a reporter asked if Hart had ever committed adultery. After an awkward silence, the former Colorado senator replied that rumors of his infidelity had nothing to do with his qualifications to be president. By not answering, Hart explicitly refused to endorse the 1960s emblem adopted by civil rights and women's

groups that "the personal is political." Hart subsequently exited the race, and Michael Dukakis, whose moral rectitude was never in doubt, was nominated instead.

In contrast, the Clinton presidency was all about the politics of persona. By making the personal so political, Bill Clinton confronted a public that since 1988 had either "matured" in its thinking about its leaders and was more realistic in its expectations, or an electorate whose tolerance of indecency in the Oval Office was the single best indicator that the country's values had gone awry. Clinton's actions—and, indeed, his entire personal history—made clear that the 1960s aphorism that "the personal is political" has come to dominate all aspects of public life. Clinton's own story, first as an Oxford student who avoided the draft and experimented with drugs and later as the married man who conducted numerous extramarital affairs, became a symbol for the loose morality many saw embodied in the 1960s generation that has contributed so mightily to the present values divide. Today, Clinton's wife, Hillary, embodies several of the contradictions many citizens have regarding their own values standards. Supporters see the former Barry Goldwater girl as a role model for independent-minded women who enjoy separate careers apart from their husbands, and they rejoiced when she won a Senate seat from New York. But these same defenders were dismayed when she adopted a Tammy Wynette-like stance (something she once vowed she would never do) and stood by her man during the Monica Lewinsky affair.

Even as powerful and untold a tale as the complicated marriage of Bill and Hillary Clinton, pales in contrast to the values shift that has occurred in everyday family lives of ordinary Americans. How we live, work, and interact with each other, and who we have sex with (and how often), has altered the way we think about each other and ourselves. Not surprisingly, these alterations have animated and transformed present-day politics. For the moment, Americans have been given a respite from the values controversy. George W. Bush is no Bill Clinton, and he is unlikely to challenge the public much when it comes to reconstructing old values to fit present circumstances. Instead of pointing the way to the future, George and Laura Bush are emblematic of the sedate 1950s, a far cry from Bill and Hillary Clinton who seemed to enjoy challenging conventional mores. Yet, even with George and Laura Bush as the present-day incarnation of Dwight and Mamie Eisenhower, a new values politics continues to echo in the nation's civic life. By making the personal entirely political, it is clear that the values divide, which intensified during Bill Clinton's presidency and marked George W. Bush's election in 2000, is

the demarcation line for an intensely personal politics as it is practiced at the beginning of the twenty-first century. . . .

Defining what it means to be an American is subject to considerable and varied interpretation. . . . Each side in the culture wars is fighting a battle that gives very different answers to the question, "What does it mean to be an American?" One faction emphasizes duty and morality; another stresses individual rights and self-fulfillment. The result is a values divide. As one activist put it, "This is a war of ideology, it's a war of ideas, it's a war about our way of life. And it has to be fought with the same intensity, I think, and dedication as you would fight a shooting war."

The values divide has created its own political lexicon. Liberals routinely label their orthodox counterparts "right-wing zealots," "religious nuts," "fanatics," "extremists," "moral zealots," "fear brokers," "militants," "demagogues," "homophobes," "latter-day Cotton Mathers," or "patriots of paranoia." They maintain that their opponents are "anti-intellectual and simplistic," with a message that is "vicious," "cynical," "narrow," "divisive," and "irrational." While serving as president of Yale University, the late A. Bartlett Giamatti once told the freshman class that the religious right is "angry at change, rigid in the application of chauvinistic slogans, absolutist in morality, [and threatens] through political pressure or public denunciation whoever dares to disagree with their authoritarian positions." Giamatti felt certain that his Yale freshmen would find a more enlightened answer to the question, "What does it mean to be an American?"

Newly formed liberal organizations have sought to promote their interpretation of freedom, individualism, and equality of opportunity. The National Organization for Women (NOW) advocates greater economic and cultural freedoms for women: "We believe that a true partnership between the sexes *demands a different concept of marriage*, an equitable sharing of the responsibilities of home and children and of the economic burdens of their support." The People for the American Way likewise sees itself as promoting an authentic Americanism: "In Congress and state capitals, in classrooms and in libraries, in courthouses and houses of worship, on the airwaves and on the printed page, on sidewalks and in cyberspace, we work to promote full citizen participation in our democracy and safeguard the principles of our Constitution from those who threaten the American dream. Join us in defending the values our country was founded on: pluralism, individuality, and freedom of thought, expression, and religion."

Those who belong to the NOW and People for the American Way, like many others who espouse liberal causes, extol the new freedoms

individuals have to make choices in their personal lives. When asked by pollster John Zogby whether there are "absolute moral truths that govern our lives," those who classified themselves as "progressives" or "very liberal" were evenly divided: 48 percent agreed, 46 percent disagreed. Those who were "very conservative" were much more emphatic: 74 percent said there are absolute truths; only 25 percent disagreed.

As these poll numbers indicate, the values divide between liberals and conservatives over lifestyle issues has become a chasm. Jen Morgan, a conservative Christian from San Diego, worried that the messages conveyed by the popular culture represent a wholesale attack on the biblical truism that two-parent families work best: "Society wants us to think that two women are just as qualified to raise children, or two men are just as qualified to raise children. All of the . . . wrong morals that go along with that sort of a lifestyle and . . . because of that, the whole definition of the family is changing. . . . It all is breaking the family down, because God wanted it to be man and woman raising a family. He must have had a reason for that." . . .

Nowhere are the cultural differences greater than they are between those who attend church frequently (whatever their denomination) and those who go less regularly or not at all. This gap between the "churched" and the "less churched" has contributed to the passions behind the debate about the country's values. Without a doubt, the United States is a very religious country. More than 90 percent believe in God; 85 percent view the Bible as the actual or inspired word of God; and 52 percent have an unfavorable view of atheists. Back in 1958, 83 percent told the Gallup Organization that the "ideal president of the United States" would be someone who attended church regularly. And most Americans continue to pay homage to religion: 72 percent believe that religious groups should be permitted to use public school grounds to hold their after-school meetings; 66 percent favor daily prayer in public classrooms; and 80 percent want prayers said at high school commencements. Running for the U.S. Senate in 1998, Arkansas Democrat Blanche Lincoln touted her "personal relationship with Jesus Christ," which began in college when she became a member of Billy Graham's Campus Crusade for Christ. At a church gathering, Lincoln addressed her "brothers and sisters in Christ," saying, "When I talk to Him, it's pretty informal. I just lay it all out there, say it like it is." Lincoln won easily, with 55 percent of the vote. Two years later, George W. Bush roused audiences by proposing a greater government role in assisting faith-based social programs, and 72 percent said that the discussion of religion and God in the presidential campaign had been good for the country.

But since the 1960s there has been a substantial increase in those who do not attend church. In 1963, 49 percent told the Gallup Organization they attended church regularly; 27 percent were occasional churchgoers; 4 percent seldom attended; and 19 percent did not go to a church at all. According to the latest Gallup data, 42 percent claim to attend church "at least once a week" or "almost every week," while 57 percent say they go to religious services "about once a month," "seldom," or "never." The result has been a diminution of the moral authority religious institutions once wielded. In 1988, three-quarters believed that a person can be a good Christian or Jew *without* attending a church or synagogue. Twelve years later an astonishing 58 percent agreed with the statement: "It is *not* necessary to believe in God in order to be moral and have good values." Finally, 53 percent believe it is possible to improve the nation's moral values without placing more emphasis on religion.

As the number of churchgoers decreases, those who remain in their pews are even more devoted to their religious beliefs. Jen Morgan, the fundamentalist San Diego Christian, is angry that those who are less religious have such influence in educational and cultural institutions. Speaking of atheists, Morgan says, "They are winning. We don't say 'Merry Christmas' anymore in the public school. We say 'Happy Holiday' because Christmas denotes God, denotes Jesus. There are a lot of Roman Catholics in the schools. There are a lot of Protestants. They still believe in God. . . . But here comes along people who are atheists and who are only a certain portion of the population, and they are the ones being heard." Across the other side of the values divide, Patricia Bates of DeKalb County, Georgia, counters: "The Scripture says 'Only my Father can judge which is heaven.' All of you are playing God here. Get a mirror. Are you that great? If everybody would step back and look at themselves, take a mirrored look at themselves and then ask, 'What is my purpose? Where do I fit [in] this puzzle?,' then we'd be much better off."

Unlike the early twentieth century, when many Americans battled against an influx of members of other religious groups (especially newly arrived Catholic and Jewish immigrants), today's religious controversies are with the religious institutions themselves. Those who belong to an organized religion often find answers to today's problems in God's revealed truth. The less-churched question God and seek answers from within themselves. Today there are more Americans than ever before who do *not* find answers to life's difficulties in the practice of any religious faith. The Gallup Organization has compiled an index of leading religious indicators, which measures the importance Americans place on religion, weekly church or synagogue attendance, confidence in religious institu-

tions, and belief in God. In 1941, the index stood at 730; today it reads 673. The result is a growing values gap between those who are "churched" and the increasing number of "less-churched" Americans. According to a survey conducted by the *Washington Post* and the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, of those who agreed that the federal government should take steps to protect the nation's religious heritage, 64 percent said religion was very important in their life. Likewise, of those who agreed with the proposition that there should be a high degree of separation between church and state, 84 percent said religion was not important at all to them. . . .

In a country that is increasingly diverse and tolerant, there is also a greater sense of discomfiture as different lifestyles, and the individual outlooks that prompt them, gain greater acceptance. The question that plagues virtually all contemporary political debate, "Whose country is it anyway?" divides Americans by their religious beliefs, age, race, ethnicity, and region. It is a debate destined to transform American politics. . . .

This cultural divide created its own moral federalism [in the 2000 presidential election]. Simply put, if you were gay, you were more likely to live in Vermont; if you wanted the Ten Commandments posted in the courts, you liked living in Alabama; if you were antigun, you had lots of company in Massachusetts; but if you were pro-gun, you were not alone in Wyoming. The result was an increased partisanship thanks to the cultural divide separating Democrats and Republicans on most moral issues: 91 percent of all Republicans supported Bush; 86 percent of Democrats backed Gore. But the party gap was only one of many. The gender gap returned with a vengeance: 54 percent of women supported Gore, and 53 percent of men voted for Bush. Other gaps included married versus single; churched versus less churched; the religious right versus those who were not "born again"; whites versus blacks versus Latinos; working women versus stay-at-home moms; union members versus non-union members; working class versus the prosperous middle versus the brie-and-chablis set; liberals versus conservatives; gays versus straights; gun owners versus those who didn't have guns in their homes; rural versus urban America; and in Vermont, those who were enthusiastic about civil unions versus those angry at the idea.

The gaps created by this new moral federalism were especially present in how voters viewed the country's moral direction. Overall, 39 percent said that the moral climate was headed in the right direction, whereas 57 percent said things were on the wrong track. Not surprisingly, Bush voters saw the nation's morals askew, with 62 percent answering "wrong track." Gore voters were considerably happier with the status quo: 70 percent

of them thought that the country's morals were going in the right direction. The state of the country's moral values became a prism through which voters saw politics. Blacks, liberals, and Democrats, for example, thought the country's morals were just fine. Whites, conservatives, and Republicans disagreed. How one viewed the country's moral condition also colored perceptions of the presidency, of life for the next generation, of Bill Clinton's legacy, whether the country needed a fresh start or should stay on course, whether the military had become too weak, and whether they could trust the candidates. . . .

Prior to the 2000 election, Congressman David Price, a respected North Carolina Democrat, called for a "subdued partisanship." But the passions that rule today's congressional parties make subdued partisanship an almost impossible goal. It is not only the issues separating the two congressional parties that makes bipartisanship more difficult to achieve, but it is also the demeanor of both parties. In March 2001, only one-third of House members showed up at a resort in Greenbrier, West Virginia, for the annual bipartisan retreat. [Former] Democratic minority leader Dick Gephardt stated the obvious, "Bipartisanship is over—not that it ever began." Gephardt should know. His relationships with Speakers Newt Gingrich and Dennis Hastert have been almost nonexistent. Moreover, George W. Bush has done very little negotiating with congressional Democratic leaders. But, says Gephardt, the lack of civility at the top extends to those of a lesser rank: "Democrats and Republicans don't even make eye contact when they pass one another in the halls of Congress, unless it's to exchange furious glares."

Rather than engaging in the hard task of governing, many congressional partisans find it more enticing to be sought-after guests on cable television programs such as *Crossfire*, *Hardball*, *Capital Gang*, and *The O'Reilly Factor* that promote entertainment value rather than political enlightenment. As Gephardt told his colleagues in 1998, "We are now rapidly descending into a politics where life imitates farce, fratricide dominates our public debate, and America is held hostage to tactics of smear and fear." While these words were uttered in the passions swirling around Clinton's impeachment, . . . the polarization created by values-minded activists, means that governing in the morally free twenty-first century is more difficult than ever before. Reflecting on "the politics of personal destruction" that characterized the Clinton era, Gephardt observed that it caused citizens to hate their leaders and their government: "In time, they drop out and begin treating politics as just another form of gladiatorial entertainment; they start electing professional wrestlers as governors."

Thus, we are likely to muddle along with a small-minded politics that

avoids answering the most important questions of our time. To the extent these values questions are resolved, it is likely to be outside the realm of the very partisan . . . politics that characterizes the present era. Values will continue to matter more than ever before, but it is our politics that remains unable to cope.

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MARK MONMONIER

From *Bushmanders and Bullwinkles*

Why is a geography professor's book included in a reader on American government? First, learn the vocabulary of professor Mark Monmonier: remapping, redistricting, reapportionment, gerrymandering. Every decade a census is taken of the U.S. population. While many citizens are aware of the importance of the census's demographic statistics in determining how many people live where and how well in the U.S., few realize the political consequences of the census. It decides how the 435 House of Representatives districts will be reapportioned so that they are equal in population, ensuring "one person, one vote" in the House. The electoral college is affected too, as are state legislative districts. Monmonier looks at the case study of New York City's so-called Bullwinkle District, drawn in 1992 to encompass a majority of one minority group—Hispanics. He explains why various disparate groups favor such gerrymanders. Monmonier gives political scientists a special reason to study with care the results of the 2000 and forthcoming 2010 censuses.

"REMAP" IS NOT IN THE dictionary, but it should be, as both verb and noun. Every ten years America counts heads, reallocates seats in the House of Representatives, and raises the blood pressure of elected officials and wannabe lawmakers by remapping election districts for Congress and state legislatures. And many jurisdictions also reconfigure city councils, town boards, or school districts. Because the way political cartographers relocate district boundaries affects who runs as well as who wins, a remap can strongly influence, if not determine, what a government does or doesn't do, what activities it bans or encourages, and which citizens absorb the costs or reap the benefits. Although "redistricting" refers to the process of drawing lines while "reapportionment" more narrowly