

# The Values Divide

American Politics and  
Culture in Transition

by

John Kenneth White

Catholic University of America

**CHATHAM HOUSE PUBLISHERS**

SEVEN BRIDGES PRESS, LLC

NEW YORK • LONDON

# Contents

<i>Foreword by John J. Zogby</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xv
<b>Introduction: The Values Divide</b>	<b>1</b>
Reverberations in the Echo Chamber, 4	
The Values Divide, 10	
Into the Mouths of Babes:	
The Stories of George W. Bush and Al Gore, 13	
From Reagan to Clinton: The Insertion of	
Values into the Public Square, 16	
The Plan of the Book, 18	
<b>1. Four Stories for Our Time</b>	<b>21</b>
1. We Are Family, 21	
2. "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" Redux, 25	
3. The Shaming of the [More Popular] President, 28	
4. The Inverted Election, 33	
Values Matter Most, 35	
<b>2. Whose Country?</b>	<b>41</b>
Strangers at the White House, 41	
The Death of the Establishment, 43	
The Future Arrives Ahead of Schedule, 45	
The New American Dream, 52	
Whose Country? 60	
The Private Public, 71	
<b>3. Republicans and the Politics of Virtue</b>	<b>79</b>
The Death of Libertarianism? 85	
The New Republican "Theocrats" and the Politics of Virtue, 99	

The Backlash, 108  
The Clinton-Lewinsky Scandal and the Republican Theocrats, 112  
Authoritative or Authoritarian? 113

**4. Democrats and the Lingering Legacy of Bill Clinton** **117**

The Gipper and the Comeback Kid, 119  
"I Want My Presidency Back," 127  
The Shaming of the President, 131  
Private Values, Public Morality, and  
the Plight of the Democratic Party, 135  
A Tattered Legacy, 138

**5. Campaign 2000: One Nation, Divisible** **143**

The Values Candidates, 145  
The Two Nations, 163  
The Denouement, 168

**6. The Father-Knows-Best President and  
the Return of Four-Party Politics** **171**

The Father-Knows-Best President, 175  
The Return of Four-Party Politics, 177  
The New Democratic Presidential Party, 183  
The New Republican Presidential Party, 186  
The New Republican Congressional Party, 190  
Big Questions, Small-Minded Politics, 193

**7. We're All Americans Now** **194**

The New Normalcy, 197  
George W. Bush and the New "Us" versus "Them" Politics, 202  
The Global Reach of American Culture, 206  
A Persistent Values Divide, 209  
A Rebirth of Tolerance? 215

*Notes* 221

*Index* 265

# Introduction

*Making values explicit is an activity that has been devalued and corrupted.*

—Students for a Democratic Society,  
“Port Huron Statement,” 11–15 June 1963

SOMETHING IMPORTANT HAS HAPPENED in the everyday lives of ordinary Americans. The once predominant two-parent, mostly white household with two or more children under age eighteen is giving way to several new family forms. That transformation, coupled with a multiplication of non-whites who are rapidly becoming a majority in many places, is changing how Americans live and think of each other. Almost overnight, the 1950s era with its Working Dad and Stay-at-Home Mom (forever symbolized by television’s Ozzie and Harriet Nelson and Ward and June Cleaver) is relegated to reruns on the Nickelodeon cable channel. Today, the family next door might include a single mother who has never married and is raising one or more children; live-in partners who are unmarried heterosexuals; a blended family trying to rear children and stepchildren; a two-parent family with adopted children of different racial backgrounds; a working mother and father with independent careers outside the household; or a gay couple. With every turn of the calendar page, the distance from the stereotypical post–World War II families like the Nelsons and Cleavers grows. Consider the following statistics:

- The traditional married couple—an employed husband and a wife keeping house and tending to the children at home—declined from 60 percent of U.S. households in 1972 to 27 percent in 1998. Today, in two-thirds of all married couples, both spouses go to work.<sup>1</sup>
- Since 1960, the divorce rate has more than doubled. Forty years ago there was a one-in-four chance that a child would witness his or her parents split apart; today, the odds are one in two.<sup>2</sup>
- In 1996, 32 percent of all births were to unmarried mothers, compared to just 5 percent in 1960. For whites, the percentage expanded tenfold,

from 2 percent to 26 percent, while among blacks the ratio grew three-fold, from 22 percent to 70 percent.<sup>3</sup>

- Between 1972 and 1998, the number of single-parent families—most of them headed by single mothers—grew from 5 percent to 18 percent. More than one-third of American children are living apart from their biological fathers, and 40 percent of them have not seen their fathers in at least a year.<sup>4</sup>
- The number of couples cohabiting increased from fewer than 500,000 to 5.5 million between 1960 and 2000. Two-thirds of those born between the years 1963 and 1974 say that their first union was a cohabitation.<sup>5</sup>
- California has seen its non-Hispanic whites become a minority of the state's population (49.9%). California, New Mexico, Hawaii, Houston, Boston, New York City, and Washington, D.C., comprise a growing list of places where whites are a minority. By 2010, Florida and Texas are likely to be added to the roster of states with non-white majorities.<sup>6</sup>

Years ago, political scientists Richard M. Scammon and Ben J. Wattenberg described a nation that was mostly “*unyoung, unpoor, and unblack.*”<sup>7</sup> The white, middle-class, middle-aged world of suburbanites they described formed “the real majority,” best typified by the mythical wife of a machinist living in Dayton, Ohio. Across the country, one could easily spot husbands and wives like the lady from Dayton living lives of amazing sameness in their Levittown-like suburbs. In 1967, political scientist James Q. Wilson described his boyhood home in Southern California: “Each family had a house; there it was for all to see and inspect. With a practiced glance, one could tell how much it cost, how well it was cared for, how good a lawn had been coaxed into uncertain life, and how tastefully plants and shrubs had been set out.”<sup>8</sup> It was these folks who did the country's work and voted on Election Day. This was, said Wilson, Ronald Reagan country.

I, too, was once a member of that real majority. Of the dozen or so white, ethnic, and mostly Roman Catholic families living on my street in Rhode Island when I was growing up in the 1950s, only one had a working mother. Even when inflation prompted more moms to enter the workplace a decade later, their roles inside the household did not change much. When my own mother went back to work in the mid-1960s, for example, she took a job at a local public school so that her working hours and vacations coincided with those times when my sister and I were in the classroom or at home. But even as she worked outside the home, Mom still bore the primary responsibility for preparing the family meals and making sure the children got to bed on time. Meanwhile, my father's authority remained firm, and his roles as principal breadwinner and home handyman went largely unquestioned.

The popular culture helped reinforce this stereotypical image of the real ma-

majority. Television comedies such as *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, *Father Knows Best*, and *Leave It to Beaver* featured two-parent suburban families that lived in Any Town, USA. While the siblings often got into humorous situations, the traditional roles imposed on husbands and wives formed the basis for the unambiguous moral lessons conveyed in each program's closing moments. Thus, when Ward Cleaver asked wife June, "What type of girl would you have Wally [their older son] marry?" "Oh," answered June, "Some very sensible girl from a nice family . . . one with both feet on the ground, who's a good cook, and can keep a nice house, and see that he's happy."<sup>9</sup> Even Lucy Ricardo of *I Love Lucy* was forced to conform to the traditional family norms of the 1950s, as she battled unsuccessfully with husband Ricky for a job at his Tropicana nightclub. When Lucy, Ricky, and their infant son finally moved to the Connecticut suburbs at the series end, all hopes she had for working at the Tropicana evaporated.

The traditional nuclear family with its Stay-At-Home Mom and Working Dad no longer represents the real majority. In the suburban Maryland neighborhood where I currently reside, there are plenty of single moms and single dads, lots of blended families, interracial couples, couples with adopted children of different races, and cohabiting heterosexuals and homosexuals. The proliferation of these different family forms that dominate so many neighborhoods is also reflected in the popular culture. Today, no self-respecting network executive would ever promote a situation comedy of the 1950s variety titled *Father Knows Best*. One can only imagine the huge outcry from women and men alike denouncing the reincarnated program for its blatant sexism. Certainly, that era's programmatic roles for men and women—along with the blatant racial discrimination that was also tolerated—are receding. Most Americans have welcomed the sexual and civil rights revolutions, and they continue to deplore the rigidity that once gave women few choices and discriminated against non-whites. Few want to see these discredited practices restored. Yet, it is also undeniably true that much of the romanticism surrounding the 1950s derives from television's portrayal of the idyllic family that lived in an era of moral certitude. Bob Dole voiced these sentiments when, as the 1996 Republican presidential nominee, he promised a return to a simpler era: "Let me be the bridge to a time of tranquility, faith, and confidence in action. And to those who say it was never so, that America has not been better, I say, you're wrong, and I know, because I was there. And I have seen it. And I remember."<sup>10</sup> His evocation of an idealized past prompted Simon Rosenberg of the centrist New Democrat Network to quip: "For a newer, younger America, Bob Dole was always a black and white movie in a color age."<sup>11</sup>

David Halberstam in his comprehensive book *The Fifties* writes that the family sitcoms of that era "reflected a world of warm-hearted, sensitive, tolerant Americans, a world devoid of anger and meanness of spirit and, of course, failure."<sup>12</sup> Today's new family forms create exactly the opposite image, as the values debate

that these new families engender creates a spirit of anger and mean-spiritedness that is often heard in the public square. Here's one example: Not long ago after an elementary student returned home from her local public school, her mother, as she usually does, asked how her day went. Without batting an eyelash, the young girl answered, "Good," almost casually adding, "Mr. Gaita told us he was gay." Earlier, it seemed, her first-grade teacher, David Gaita, was discussing biographies of famous people when one pupil asked about his family and if he had a wife. Gaita replied that if he had a partner, "someone you love the way your Mom and Dad love each other," it would be a man. Some parents were pleased with Gaita's candor. Pam Swift, the mother of the child who reported that her teacher was gay, told a large crowd gathered at the local parent-teacher organization meeting that she was "grateful that my child can learn about [homosexuality] in a relaxed manner." But Brian Camenker thought Gaita should be fired, arguing that "a child's psychology isn't put together to handle this stuff."<sup>13</sup>

Undeniably, times have changed. One need look no further than the Central Intelligence Agency, where the prototypical organization man (and woman) held a Gay Pride celebration in June of 2000. Addressing the assembled agents was Massachusetts Democrat Barney Frank, one of two admitted homosexuals in Congress. Frank told the crowd: "People increasingly understand that the prejudice against gay people is silly."<sup>14</sup> But if the traditional two-parent family of the 1950s is no longer the norm, what is? The lack of consensus as to what is "normal" has prompted sociologist Alan Wolfe to observe: "Once upon a time, Americans raised families without being able to know whether their children would turn out to be good or bad. Now they raise children uncertain what good and bad actually are."<sup>15</sup> This profound shift in the expression of our public values underscores two important truisms about American politics: (1) values move voters, and (2) while there is an underlying public consensus about certain values (e.g., the benefits associated with freedom, individualism, and equality of opportunity), there remains much debate as to how these values should be implemented.

### Reverberations in the Echo Chamber

It was Ronald Reagan who first demonstrated the power of values politics. Back when he was president, political scientists and pundits alike marveled at his hold on the American electorate, and wondered whether they could patent his formula for success. Colorado Democratic congresswoman Pat Schroeder coined the phrase "the Teflon President" to describe how Reagan mysteriously floated above controversy to win popular acclaim.<sup>16</sup> Certainly, Reagan's ability to charm audiences dated back to his Hollywood days. One of his most popular portrayals was that of Notre Dame football player George Gipp in the movie *Knute Rockne—All American*. Throughout his presidency, Reagan constantly invoked the character

of George Gipp. Addressing the graduates of Notre Dame University in 1981, for example, Reagan recalled the young dying Gipp's purported last words to his football coach, Knute Rocke: "Some time, Rock, when the team's up against it, when things are wrong and the breaks are beating the boys—tell them to go in there with all they've got and win just one more for the Gipper. I don't know where I'll be then, Rock. But I'll know about it and I'll be happy."<sup>17</sup> Reagan asked his listeners to "look at the significance of that story":

Rockne could have used Gipp's dying words to win a game at any time. But eight years went by following the death of George Gipp before Rock revealed those dying words, his deathbed wish. And then he told the story at halftime to a team that was losing and one of the only teams he had ever coached that was torn by dissension and jealousy and factionalism. The seniors on that team were about to close out their football careers without learning or experiencing any of the real values that the game has to impart. None of them had known George Gipp. They were children when he played for Notre Dame. It was to this team that Rockne told the story and so inspired them that they rose above their personal animosities. For someone they had never known, they joined together in a common cause and attained the unattainable.<sup>18</sup>

To Reagan, the moral lesson was clear: "Is there anything wrong with young people having an experience, feeling something so deeply, thinking of someone else to the point they can give so completely of themselves?" Reagan answered his own rhetorical question, saying: "There will come times in the lives of all of us when we'll be faced with causes bigger than ourselves, and they won't be on a playing field."<sup>19</sup>

Reagan's ability to tell riveting stories won him avid followers both in Hollywood and in Washington, D.C. Back in 1959, Vice President Richard M. Nixon wrote a letter telling Reagan to "continue your very effective speeches." Nixon's letter ended with these prophetic words: "You have the ability of putting complicated technical ideas into words everyone can understand. Those of us who have spent a number of years in Washington too often lack the ability to express ourselves in this way."<sup>20</sup>

But the potency of Reagan's storytelling lay not in its simplicity, as Nixon supposed, but in the veteran actor's ability to relate parables in which the values lessons had popular applications to the moment. One of my favorite Reagan stories is about a boy named Billy. One Sunday Billy wanted to play baseball while his father preferred reading the Sunday newspaper. To stall his son for a while, Billy's father gave him the formidable task of reassembling a newspaper map of the world that had been cut into little pieces. Reagan recounted that, after just seven minutes, the young boy had put the map together. Asked how he did it so quickly, Billy replied,



“On the other side of the map there was a picture of the family, and I found that if you put the family together the world took care of itself.”<sup>21</sup>

Such homespun tales were part of the Reagan lexicon. Once, he hinted at the secret behind his political success, telling the American Bar Association, “One of my dreams is to help Americans rise above pessimism by renewing their belief in themselves.”<sup>22</sup> Certainly, Reagan’s gift for storytelling and his television persona contributed to his thick Teflon coating. But what gave the fortieth president such a powerful grasp on public opinion were the *values* conveyed in his parables. He brilliantly summoned the country’s nostalgia for the 1950s and in so doing highlighted the consensual values of that bygone era. Also contributing to Reagan’s instinctive ability to draw voters to his cause were poll-takers who tested virtually every word of his speeches to see what resonated with the public. Indeed, the search for “reasonators” (values-laden words and symbols that summoned the mystic chords of memory of old verities in the public’s consciousness) became an obsession for Republican and Democratic strategists alike long after Reagan exited the Oval Office.

The search for words that resound with voters is an eternal one. Back during the heyday of the New Deal, Franklin Roosevelt found that evocations of class warfare mobilized voters to his cause. During the final days of his 1936 reelection campaign, for example, Roosevelt dramatically appeared on stage at Madison Square Garden and lashed out at the “economic royalists” whom he blamed for the Great Depression: “I should like to have it said of my first Administration that in it the forces of selfishness and of lust for power met their match. I should like to have it said of my second Administration that *in it these forces met their master*.”<sup>23</sup> According to Roosevelt biographer James MacGregor Burns, the audience responded to FDR’s words with an “almost animal-like roar [that] burst from the crowd, died away, and then rose again in wave after wave.”<sup>24</sup> More than six decades later, Al Gore tried to resurrect a similar theme, saying that his campaign was a crusade of “the people versus the powerful.” But Gore’s populism seemed dated, and even his ticket-mate, Joseph Lieberman, doubted that such declarations of class warfare were the right words for a prosperous time.<sup>25</sup>

There is more to the search for words that move voters than finding the right wordsmith. Behind it is a question that all students of politics must answer: What moves voters? Is it the economy, as Franklin Roosevelt, Bill Clinton, and Al Gore presumed? Is it ideology, as Ronald Reagan or George McGovern might have supposed? Is it a single issue, as both sides on the abortion debate might think? Or are voters just plain ignorant? On one side of the debate is political scientist V.O. Key Jr., whose book *The Responsible Electorate* begins with the simple premise, “Voters are not fools.”<sup>26</sup> Key believed Americans operated in an “echo chamber” where their verdicts on parties and candidates “can be no more than a selective reflection from among the alternatives and outlooks presented to

them.”<sup>27</sup> The other side of the argument was given by Walter Lippmann, whose 1925 book *The Phantom Public* expressed doubt that there was much intelligence behind the balloting: “We call an election an expression of the popular will. But is it? We go into a polling booth and mark a cross on a piece of paper for one of two, or perhaps three or four names. Have we expressed our thoughts on the public policy of the United States? Presumably we have a number of thoughts on this and that with many buts and ifs and ors. Surely the cross on a piece of paper does not express them.”<sup>28</sup> Earlier, Woodrow Wilson offered his own twist on Lippmann’s argument, saying that while he was a smart voter, those in power could not be trusted: “I, for my part, when I vote at a critical election, should like to be able to vote for a definite line of policy with regard to the great questions of the day—not for platforms, which Heaven knows, mean little enough—but for *men* known and tried in public service; with records open to be scrutinized with reference to these very matters; and pledged to do this or that particular thing; to take [a] definite course of action. As it is, I vote for nobody I can depend upon to do anything—no, not if I were to vote for myself.”<sup>29</sup>

The search for the intelligence (or lack thereof) behind the ballots cast in any given election is as old as the political science profession itself, and, over time, the answer to the question, “What moves voters?” has varied. Back in 1928, when Democrat Al Smith, who was the first Roman Catholic to be nominated by a major party for president, the editors of the *Springfield (Massachusetts) Republican* thought they had uncovered the mystery behind people’s votes. In an editorial, the paper observed that when Bay State voters discussed politics, they talked in terms of “French, Irish, Pole, and Yankee or Catholic and non-Catholic.” The paper concluded, “Votes will undoubtedly be cast on other issues, particularly prohibition and prosperity, but when you get down to the ground there’s dirt!”<sup>30</sup> The anti-Catholic slurs were heard in Boston’s heavily Catholic wards, where 90 percent of the ballots went to Smith, and in the white Protestant South, where “yellow dog Democrats” in seven states bolted to Republican Herbert Hoover.<sup>31</sup> Thirty-two years later, religion once again seemed to provide the best explanation for the balloting when another Roman Catholic, John F. Kennedy, became the Democratic Party’s presidential nominee. According to one study, 78 percent of Catholics supported Kennedy, while 63 percent of white Protestants backed Republican Richard Nixon.<sup>32</sup>

But religion is just one explanation among many offered to explain the motives behind the ballots. Another is racial and ethnic profiling. When Al Smith campaigned in many of the nation’s industrial centers in 1928, he could have easily passed by signs posted on business establishments reading “NO IRISH NEED APPLY.” Racial profiling continues to be a staple of the politics of “us” versus “them.” The influx of blacks into the Democratic Party during the 1960s is one of the principal reasons why southern whites flocked to the GOP. Richard Nixon’s

so-called Southern Strategy for appealing to white voters below the Mason-Dixon line rested on racial stereotypes of black “welfare queens” receiving government handouts. Reflecting on this era of American politics, veteran political reporter Sander Vanocur noted that race remains “the dirty little secret of American politics.”<sup>33</sup> Ethnicity matters once more following the September 11th terrorist attacks. In the aftermath, several reports have circulated of Arabs and Arab-Americans being routinely stopped at airports and closely questioned by authorities. One armed Secret Service agent who was on his way to guard George W. Bush at his Texas ranch during the Christmas holiday was detained when security personnel noticed he was of Arab descent and were troubled by “inconsistencies” in his paper work.<sup>34</sup>

Political scientists have long noted the impact of religious, racial, and ethnic profiling in their studies of voting behavior. Among the first to take sociological factors into account were Bernard R. Berelson and Paul F. Lazarsfeld, who contributed to *The People's Choice* (1940) and *Voting* (1948).<sup>35</sup> In these books, Berelson and Lazarsfeld described how socioeconomic standing (education, income, and class); religion (Catholic, Protestant, or Jewish); and place of residence (rural or urban) formed an “index of political predisposition” that strongly influenced choices made inside the voting booth.<sup>36</sup> How the political parties responded to group interests, the two political scientists reasoned, would determine which one got the most votes. Thus, a well-educated, white, upper-class Protestant from upstate New York would most likely be a Republican; while a black, blue-collar worker from Detroit would tilt toward the Democrats. Joining a political party was not based on the issues per se but instead constituted a declaration about who you were or where you were born. Yet, soon after Berelson’s and Lazarsfeld’s works were published, scholars began to question their hypothesis. In 1954, Michigan political scientists Angus Campbell, Gerald Gurin, and Warren E. Miller wrote: “Many a political prognosticator has been led into difficulties by the confident assumption that the major population classes will vote in the next election as they have voted in the recent past.”<sup>37</sup>

Other scholars believe that voters are more rational-minded and less emotional when entering the polling booths. This view ascribes to the electorate the intelligence to take stock of the candidates’ issue positions and react accordingly. Thus, when George H.W. Bush told voters in 1988, “Read my lips, no new taxes,” the election returns seemingly gave him an order to keep his word. Speaking to reporters the day after the balloting, Bush declared that “the American people had spoken” and their message was to “hold the line on taxes,” adding, “The American people must have understood that when they voted in rather large numbers for my candidacy.”<sup>38</sup>

The idea that voters respond to issues alone gained ground back in 1950 when the American Political Science Association issued a report titled *Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System*. In it, the political scientists noted that the “sum-

mation of professional knowledge” to that time proved that *issues*, not group interests, moved voters to action: “*An effective party system requires, first, that the parties are able to bring forth programs to which they commit themselves and, second, that the parties profess sufficient internal cohesion to carry out these programs.*”<sup>39</sup> The report writers blamed poor turnout and party divisions on their inability to pose compelling questions to the voters: “*By and large, alternatives between the parties are defined so badly that it is often difficult to determine what the election has decided even in the broadest terms.*”<sup>40</sup>

In the five decades since *Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System* was published, many political scientists continue to believe that issues have a major impact on voter choices. In 1971, Gerald Pomper found a significant increase in the correlation between policy and partisan voting.<sup>41</sup> Likewise, Norman Nie, Sidney Verba, and John Petrocik argued that the Vietnam War and civil rights controversies accentuated partisan differences and that voters could not help but be aware of them.<sup>42</sup> Simply put, despite the sentiment expressed by George Wallace in 1968—that there wasn’t “a dime’s worth of difference” between Democrats and Republicans—the partisan divide has widened tenfold thanks to the profound policy disagreements the two parties have on a host of hot-button issues. Nonetheless, voter turnout maintains its decline, and worried political scientists continue to take the temperature of an anemic party system.

Others believe that the economy remains the dominant voice in Key’s echo chamber. According to this theory, self-interested voters continuously ask candidates, “What have you done for me lately?” Usually, the answers given contain a blizzard of economic statistics. Anthony Downs in his famous 1957 book, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, stated that economic considerations always prompt citizens to act rationally inside the voting booth: “The most important part of a voter’s decision is the size of his *current party differential*, i.e., the difference between the utility income he actually received in period *t* and the one he would have received if the opposition had been in power.”<sup>43</sup> Over the years, Downs’s thesis has gained favor among academics. Not surprisingly, the rise in the number of his citations of his book has coincided with the increased number of elections in which the outcome was explained by the country’s poor economic health.<sup>44</sup> Back in 1980, for example, Ronald Reagan derided Jimmy Carter’s handling of the economy: “Can anyone look at the record of this administration and say, ‘Well done’? Can anyone compare the state of our economy when the Carter administration took office with where we are today and say, ‘Keep up the good work?’”<sup>45</sup> Later, in a debate with Carter, Reagan supplied the calculus voters needed to make their decision:

Are you better off than you were four years ago? Is it easier for you to go and buy things in the stores than it was four years ago? Is there more or less unemployment in the country than there was four years ago? And if you answer all of those

questions “yes,” why then, I think your choice is very obvious as to whom you will vote for. If you don’t agree, if you don’t think this course that we’ve been on for the last four years is what you would like to see us follow for the next four, then I could suggest another choice you have.<sup>46</sup>

A dozen years later Bill Clinton would emulate Reagan’s question by using the shorthand sign James Carville posted in his Little Rock headquarters: “It’s the economy, stupid!” Exit polls showed just how potent the economy had become as a voting issue: one-third (a plurality) said they were financially “worse off” than they were in 1988, and Clinton won 61 percent of their ballots.<sup>47</sup> The emphasis on the economy reinforced Downs’s belief that “each citizen casts his vote for the party he believes will provide him with more benefits than any other.”<sup>48</sup> But in 2000, the models of rational voting uniformly predicted an easy victory for Al Gore.<sup>49</sup> The fact that the political scientists were so wildly off the mark made it clear that the perennial question, “What moves voters?” required a new answer.

The emphasis on the economy as the most important variable in determining how people vote conjures an image of the hypothetical voter taking out his or her wallet and using a calculator to figure whether he or she is financially better off than was the case two, four, or eight years earlier. After decades of study, I believe that while race, ethnicity, religion, and the economy remain important concerns to many Americans, values provide the *connective tissue* linking public policy to voter attitudes about contemporary politics. Certainly, during the 1920s Americans had many opinions about the country’s immigration or prohibition policies. Likewise, during the 1960s, there was a blitzkrieg of views on civil rights and the sexual revolution. Today, there are lively and contentious debates on many issues. Following the September 11th terrorist attacks, for example, Americans are balancing their security concerns with their traditional respect for constitutionally guaranteed civil liberties. How we decide these issues is influenced by which racial or ethnic group we belong to, as Berelson and Lazarsfeld believed. But also underlying these opinions are core values. How do the values of freedom and equality of opportunity translate into public policy? Which party is acting in ways that make these values more real in the lives of ordinary Americans? It is these controversies that are shaping the new values debate.

## The Values Divide

While politicians sometimes give voice to voters’ values, what often animates today’s politics is a genuine uncertainty as to what constitutes “good values.” According to one recent poll, two-thirds of U.S. residents believe the country is “greatly divided when it comes to the most important values.”<sup>50</sup> The public’s in-

ability to reach a values consensus was evident in a 1998 report issued by the National Commission on Civic Renewal. Co-chairs Sam Nunn and William Bennett—one a Democrat, the other a Republican—saw a nation rife with contradictions and unsettled values:

We fret about the weakness of our families, but will not make the personal commitments needed to preserve them. We worry about the consequences of out-of-wedlock births, but refuse to condemn them. We deplore the performance of our public schools, but somehow we can't find the time to join parents' associations, attend school board meetings, or even help our children with their homework. We complain about the influence of popular culture on our young people, but as parents we do not try very hard to monitor the programs our children watch and the music they hear. We desert neighborhood associations, and then lament the fraying of community. We elect, and then reelect, leaders for whom we profess mistrust. We say we do not have the time for civic life. But, in fact, we enjoy more leisure than ever before. And too many of us spend it watching television.<sup>51</sup>

These contradictions have resulted in profound disagreements among scholars as to what constitutes good values. In 2001, Alan Wolfe published *Moral Freedom*, a book celebrating the twenty-first century as one where moral freedom will transform civil society just as significantly as the sexual and civil rights revolutions affected the last century.<sup>52</sup> Yet only one year earlier, James Davison Hunter authored *The Death of Character*, which began with the bold claim: "Character is dead. Attempts to revive it will yield little. Its time has passed."<sup>53</sup> Such disagreements among public intellectuals as to the societal implications of the nation's shifting values can enliven and even illuminate our understanding of contemporary politics. In 1998, Andrew Kohut, director of the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, maintained that ethical concerns "are now weighing down American attitudes as Vietnam, Watergate, double-digit inflation, and unemployment once did."<sup>54</sup> In a year that saw Bill Clinton impeached for lying to a grand jury about his sexual relationship with a White House intern, it was not surprising that debates about public and private morals dominated the rhetoric heard in the public square. What is worth remembering is that Americans have always worried about their values. Back in 1643, a Connecticut Puritan minister preached, "The prosperity and well-being of the Commonwealth doth much depend upon the well government and ordering of particular families."<sup>55</sup> In 1890, the editor of *Youth's Companion* magazine was shocked to see a group of boys aiming their snowballs at some nearby girls. What prompted him to write a stinging editorial condemning the boys was not the offense itself but the fact that it had occurred within sight of the American flag, which symbolized "*fair play, equal chance, protection to the weak, and honor to women.*"<sup>56</sup> The editorial writer could

only scoff at the goings-on within these families that had produced such abominable behavior. A report to the National Congregational Council issued two years later declared: “Much of the very mechanism of our modern life . . . is very destructive of the family.”<sup>57</sup>

Even as the traditional two-parent family was being celebrated in the years immediately after World War II, Americans continued to fret over the country’s moral health. In 1965, Lyndon B. Johnson repeated the commonly held assumption that “the family is the cornerstone of our society” and warned that when families are damaged children suffer, and when this happens on a large scale “the community itself is crippled.”<sup>58</sup> Three years later, historian Theodore Roszak thought Johnson’s fears had come to pass. In his view, the critique of the 1950s-style family had been turned on its head with disastrous results:

For generations now, radical intellectuals have lambasted the bad habits of bourgeois society: “the bourgeoisie,” they have insisted, “is obsessed by greed; its sex life is insipid and prudish; its family patterns are debased; its slavish conformities of dress and cosmetics are degrading; its mercenary routinization of existence is intolerable; its vision of life is drab and joyless, etc., etc.” So the kids try this and that, and one by one they discard the vices of their parents, preferring the less structured ways of their own childhood and adolescence—only to discover that many an old-line radical, embarrassed by the brazen sexuality and unwashed feet, glad-rags and playful ways, is taking up the chorus: “No that is not what I meant, that is not what I meant at all.”<sup>59</sup>

Rozzak coined the term *counter culture* to describe the youthful social experiments: “The counter culture is the embryonic cultural base of New Left politics, the effort to discover new types of community, new family patterns, new sexual mores, new kinds of livelihood, new aesthetic forms, new personal identities on the far side of power politics, the bourgeois home, and the Protestant work ethic.”<sup>60</sup> Ironically, even the Students for a Democratic Society, who came to symbolize Roszak’s counterculture, agreed that society’s values had badly eroded and blamed their parents for the problem: “Making values explicit is an activity that has been devalued and corrupted. . . . Unlike youth in other countries, we are used to moral leadership being exercised and moral dimensions being clarified by our elders.”<sup>61</sup>

What makes today’s debate about values different is that there is no longer a consensus as to what constitutes “good family values.” The values consensus that existed prior to the sexual revolution of the 1960s forbade premarital sex; saw divorce as a horror to be avoided; and never, ever discussed homosexuality in polite company. That general agreement has been shattered. To take but one small example, when the Roper Organization first inquired about premarital sex in 1939, the question asked separately of men and women read: “Do you consider it all

right, unfortunate, or wicked when young girls have sexual relations before marriage?”<sup>62</sup> Likewise, one of the first known questions to include homosexuality is also frozen in its own values prism. In 1974, the Roper Organization asked respondents to think ahead twenty or thirty years and list the threats to “life as we know it in the United States.” Communism got the most mentions with 50 percent, but homosexuality was cited by 13 percent. Also making the list were sexual permissiveness (25 percent), civil rights (17 percent), and women’s liberation (9 percent).<sup>63</sup> In the decades since these polls were taken, survey researchers have asked innumerable questions about sexual matters, and as their inquiries have expanded, new barriers have been broken. In 1994, for instance, pollsters wondered whether there should be legally sanctioned gay marriages. Not surprisingly, 62 percent opposed the idea.<sup>64</sup>

The sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s has resulted in a profound rethinking of our values, and the echoes from that era continue to be heard in the political arena.<sup>65</sup> House Speaker Newt Gingrich, for example, once accused President Bill Clinton of advocating “a multi-cultural nihilistic hedonism that is inherently destructive of a healthy society.”<sup>66</sup> Democrats retorted that Republicans longed for the “good old days” of the 1950s when women were suppressed, white males reigned supreme, and blacks and gays were relegated to the shadows of life. Given such partisan typecasting, it is not surprising that many of the most important values debates occur far from Washington, D.C. To take but one example, several local jurisdictions have joined with private businesses to give health care benefits to partners of their gay employees. These changes have been controversial. In 1997, for example, the Southern Baptist Convention sponsored a boycott of the Walt Disney Corporation when it decided to extend health care benefits to the live-in partners of its gay employees.

Ironically, the values division has created its own peculiar dualism. While Americans worry that traditional families are a thing of the past and bemoan the cultural decay they see prevalent around them, they also long for a simpler era. Those uncomplicated times are romanticized each night on cable television where 1950s-era programs such as *The Honeymooners* and *I Love Lucy* attract cult followings. For fans of these shows, bus driver Ralph Kramden will forever threaten to send his wife Alice “to the moon,” even as he valiantly tries to realize the American dream. And Lucy Ricardo will likewise continue to entertain the children of the twenty-first century with her slapstick antics, just as she delighted their parents.

### **Into the Mouths of Babes: The Stories of George W. Bush and Al Gore**

This longing for a back-to-the-future existence where life was simpler and values were made clear appeals to baby boomer parents. Many find this ironic, since



### George W. Bush

The Bushes' home in Odessa was a two-room apartment, and they shared a bathroom with another family. They were thankful to have a bathroom at all, since most of their neighbors used outhouses. . . . Years later George W. Bush would describe his childhood . . . as "a happy blur," surrounded by love and friends and sports.

. . . .

[B]y 1966, most students at Yale, especially the younger students, were not impressed by fraternities. The mood on many college campuses was for students to question their parents' values. If dad had been a fraternity man, that was reason not to join.

George W. Bush couldn't understand this point of view. His family, his parents, mattered more to him than anything else. . . . George could be wild, but not in any way that challenged "the Establishment." The Establishment was what protesters in the late 1960s called the government, business, parents—anyone in authority. . . . To George, the Establishment was his father—his whole family. He might do things to annoy them, but he would never really rebel against them or question their values. . . . At Yale, the class of 1968 passed around a petition against the war in Vietnam. Most of the class signed it, but not George or his friends.

. . . .

It never occurred to George to try to avoid the military service. Military service was a proud tradition in his family, and his own father was a war hero. He had seen the pictures of his father's rescue by a submarine after he was shot down over the Pacific Ocean. Barbara Bush had glued into a family scrapbook a small piece of the rubber life raft that had kept her husband afloat.

*Source:* Beatrice Gormley, *President George W. Bush: Our Forty-Third President* (New York: Aladdin Paperbacks, 2000), 5, 26, 54, 58, 59, 60, 62.

these are the same parents who have had to reconcile their rebellious pasts with the values they wish to impart to their children. Two Gallup polls illustrate the change of heart. In 1977, 53 percent believed that possession of small amounts of marijuana should not be treated as a criminal offense; 41 percent disagreed. By 2000, the figures were reversed: 51 percent wanted possession treated as a criminal offense; 47 percent did not.<sup>67</sup>

## Al Gore

Albert Gore [Senior] had spent his boyhood on a farm, and he believed that working the land built his character. He wanted his son to have the same experience of working hard, breathing fresh air, and raising crops and livestock. . . . Senator Gore left orders that his son was to get up every morning at six and put in a full day's work, just like the hired hands. "No boy of mine is going to lay up in bed while the sun shines," he declared.

. . . .

Al took no part in any student protests. He was sure that the war in Vietnam was wrong, and he admired his father for speaking out in the Senate against it. But he knew it could hurt his father politically if Al were seen in a demonstration. . . . There was an even stronger reason why Al didn't march on the streets or burn his draft card. He didn't agree with the ideals of the radical Left. Some extremists were saying that America was no better than Nazi Germany and were calling for a revolution. Like his parents, Al believed that government could do great good for its citizens. He was not willing to say, as many students did, that the U.S. government was the enemy. After all, his own father, the man he admired and loved so much, was part of the government. . . . He said that if he found a fancy way of not going [to Vietnam] someone else would have to go in his place. . . .

[T]he violently antiwar students on the Harvard campus didn't know anything about Al's inside. They saw only that he was one of the despised U.S. military. They yelled insults, and they stared at him as if they hated him. Al was astonished and angry—he had gone through such a struggle trying to do the right thing. He was one of only a dozen students in his Harvard class of more than one thousand who would go to Vietnam.

*Source:* Beatrice Gormley, *President Albert Gore, Jr.: Our Forty-Third President* (unpublished manuscript presented to Aladdin Paperbacks, 2000), 15, 32, 52, 53, 58, 60.

Children's books often provide illuminating insights into our values thinking. In 2000, Beatrice Gormley prepared two biographies of presidential contenders George W. Bush and Al Gore, only one of which was to be published once a winner was determined. Gormley, a gifted writer of dozens of children's books, retold the familiar personal histories of the two candidates for her nine- to fourteen-year-old audience. But the power of both manuscripts lay in the values of faith

and family that shaped each candidate's life story. Although both men claimed that vast policy differences separated them, the values each sought to convey were remarkably similar. By evoking a world many Americans wistfully remembered, even if they could no longer return there, Bush and Gore conveyed certain moral truisms that many Americans wanted restored.

As with most children's books, many of the unsavory details in the lives of its subjects are left out. We don't learn, for example, that George W. Bush's father played an instrumental role in making sure his son got a coveted space in the National Guard. Likewise, Bush's alleged drug-taking and alcohol abuse are minimized. In Al Gore's case, the young reader is never told that Gore had some radical views of the military while a college student. Unspoken, for example, is a letter the younger Gore wrote to his father, then a U.S. senator. In it, Gore argued that hatred of communism had bred its own form of national paranoia: "We do have inveterate antipathy for communism—or paranoia as I like to put it. My own belief is that this form of psychological ailment—in this case a national madness—leads the victim to actually create the thing which is feared the most. . . . *For me, the best example is the U.S. Army.*"<sup>68</sup> Years later when shown the letter he had written to his father, Gore was horrified, telling a reporter: "Oh, good Lord! Oh, God! Is that a private letter? Did he share that with you? Good Lord!"<sup>69</sup>

Gore's embarrassment at an enterprising reporter's brandishing a thirty-year-old letter was entirely understandable. Most Baby Boomers prefer not to discuss what they now see as some of the more distasteful aspects of their youth. Many silently agreed with George W. Bush when he dismissed press inquiries about his youthful escapades, saying: "When I was young and irresponsible, I was young and irresponsible."<sup>70</sup> In a way, baby boomers (like many other Americans) have created their own values dualism, wanting the values-based simplicity of the 1950s but not really wanting to return to that time. At the same time, there is a sense that the country is on uncharted territory in its values—a feeling that creates its own fears and apprehensions.

### **From Reagan to Clinton: The Insertion of Values into the Public Square**

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."<sup>71</sup> 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.”<sup>72</sup> 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.

## The Plan of the Book

*The Values Divide* begins with the premise that values matter most in understanding contemporary politics. But whose values? This debate is changing long-established rules that govern how voters behave. Chapter 1 tells four contemporary stories, each signifying the transformation in public values. These stories include the ratification in Vermont of civil unions for gay couples; the many values contradictions contained in the legal dispute between Arizona state representative Steve May and the U.S. Army; the surprising public reaction to Bill Clinton's dalliance with Monica Lewinsky; and the virtual tie between George W. Bush and Al Gore. In the first three tales, the public was faced with a series of values conundrums they would have preferred to avoid. During the 2000 campaign, both Bush and Gore were offering the voters a respite from the values divide. Even so, the split between Bush and Gore voters was largely along values lines. Moreover, the ongoing arguments as to how to interpret the enduring American values of freedom, individualism, and equality of opportunity has advanced the values debates to new levels. Chapter 2 describes the controversies caused by these shifting values, and how the country's changing ethnic and familial composition is contributing to the new values divide. The result is a struggle not just for political supremacy by the country's new immigrants and family forms that are challenging what is left of Scammon and Wattenberg's "real majority," but over the idea of just what values the nation stands for and how they should be translated into public policy. Simply put, whose country is it anyway?

The lack of a compelling answer to this question makes assembling a partisan majority an exceptionally difficult task. Chapter 3 describes how the Republican Party came to embody the values of freedom and individualism during the New Deal era. But during the 1990s, adherents of the religious right and a powerful cadre of congressional leaders seriously questioned this long-held Republican faith in the virtue of the citizen to freely make good moral choices. Like its detractors, these morally-minded Republicans came to believe that the once all-powerful Moral Majority was neither. The result has been an internal split between the party's more libertarian-minded thinkers and its moralists that has cost the party vital public backing on the crucial value of tolerance.

But neither have the Democrats been spared their values troubles. As previously noted, Bill Clinton came to embody many of the values contradictions of

the 1990s. Although he survived impeachment, when it came to representing values Americans wanted personified in their political leaders, Clinton and his fellow Democrats suffered. While Democrats may have an advantage on the value of tolerance, voters who wish a restoration of traditional family roles turn to the Republicans.

Chapter 5 describes how these partisan values liabilities shaped the 2000 presidential campaign. Each of the major party presidential candidates—Bill Bradley and Al Gore for the Democrats, and George W. Bush and John McCain for the Republicans—sought to cast himself as a restorer of values. Each promised that he could serve as a moral example to the nation's children, and in so doing, he would give the public a respite from the Clinton scandals. Moreover, the eventual nominees, George W. Bush and Al Gore, both achieved some success in reducing their vulnerabilities on values issues. Specifically, Bush sought to overcome his party's weakness on tolerance issues by stressing his belief in a "compassionate conservatism." Gore sought to distance himself from Clinton by emphasizing his preference for traditional families. Both strategies worked just enough to produce the perfect tie that contributed to the Florida fracas.

Chapter 6 tells the story of how George W. Bush coped with the values divide that still gripped the country during the first nine months of his controversial presidency. After some reflection, I decided to leave this chapter relatively unamended following the September 11th terrorist attacks for two reasons: (1) the chapter describes certain aspects of the Bush persona that remain unchanged; (2) the challenges that face government, business, and religious leaders in an era where morality is writ small and deference to authority is no longer a given, linger on in the post-September 11th environment, and (3) the renewed form of four-party politics depicted in the chapter quickly reasserted itself in the hundred days following the terrorist attacks.

Chapter 7 tries to bring the traumatic events of 11 September 2001 into focus. Clearly, the actions of Osama bin Laden united all Americans, and talk of a values divide has disappeared for a while. Yet, while it is true that nearly everyone was taken aback by the brazenness of the strikes, there remained significant differences as to how many Americans perceived the values lessons contained in the stories of the heroes who survived them. Some saw numerous examples of individual bravery, including heroic acts by a homosexual airline passenger who fought with the hijackers and the gay priest who died giving last rites to those on the ground. Others, including Republican evangelists Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell, believed that the terrorists were God's wrathful instruments designed to inflict harm on a sinful nation. Still others saw the American-turned-Taliban-sympathizer John Walker Lindh either as a young man gone awry, or as the byproduct of a liberal-minded, morally loose Southern California culture. While it is much too early to know the full significance of the September 11th attacks, one aphorism holds true: Expect the

unexpected. In this case, the unexpected may mean a rebirth and redefinition of the value of tolerance, the implication of which is likely to alter the values divide in ways unlikely to satisfy activists on either side.